

# ESSAYS IN SOCIOLOGY

VOL. I.

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR.*

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ESSAYS TOWARDS A CRITICAL METHOD.  
NEW ESSAYS TOWARDS A CRITICAL METHOD  
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# ESSAYS IN SOCIOLOGY

BY

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## DESPONDENT SOCIOLOGY.\*

(1893.)

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### I.

IT is a good many years since we have had in our sociological literature a good, serious, sounding croak over the prospects of civilisation. Mr. W. R. Greg's 'Rocks Ahead' is the last performance of the kind which at once recalls itself; and indeed there are many readers who will not recall even that; for Mr. Greg, who was rather overrated in his lifetime, is not now much attended to. Thus Mr. C. H. Pearson, who has devoted a large volume under the title of 'National Life and Character: a Forecast' to themes corresponding to Mr. Greg's, may be said to have had a first-rate opening. It is true, the Duke of Argyll seems to have been performing on the same key

\*[Since this critique was written, the present writer has been himself accused of taking a uniformly sombre or "disdainful" view of social evolution in the *past*. Without owning that hard impeachment, he confesses to seeing much more matter for sombre summary in a past studded with failures than in the average situation of civilization to-day. At almost any moment, indeed, there are *some* grounds for grave disquiet in the drift of any civilization whatever; and since Mr. Pearson wrote there have emerged into great clearness, for some of us, grounds for such disquietude in tendencies where he seems to have been partly committed to seeing a process of racial

in a recent work entitled 'The Unseen Foundations of Society'; but then nobody pays much heed to the Duke of Argyll, who, as a journalist once said of him, is "much given to rehearsing the day of judgment, with himself, to use a very inadequate figure, in the chair". Seriously, the Duke of Argyll is only an aristocratic and ego-tistic amateur in sociology; whereas Mr. Pearson has by solid work earned the right to be heard. His *History of England in the Early and Middle Ages*, and his smaller book on *English History in the Fourteenth Century*, will be remembered by all who have read them as the work of an uncommonly thoughtful and vigilant culture-historian. And a glance at the scheme of his 'National Life and Character' suffices to show that he has taken up a theme which will tax all the thought and vigilance that can be brought to bear on it.

revival. But the end of all criticism of social tendency, as of all survey of the past, is to prescribe courses, and it is precisely because of the conclusions he has drawn from the study of the past that the writer resists the conclusions drawn by Mr. Pearson from his survey of the present, these being (in the present writer's opinion) of the nature of false prescriptions. Even if one's view of past evolution be pronounced "pessimistic", there is really no necessary connection between such so-called "pessimism" and despondency; and Mr. Pearson was rather a despondent than a pessimist. And, of course, "pessimism" is a wrong description of the view of things set forth by those of us who prescribe methods of reconstruction. See the essay on 'Culture and Pessimism' hereinafter.]

Almost at the outset of Mr. Pearson's book, one has the comfort of feeling oneself in the hands of a man who has read widely and mastered his material, and who is neither commonplace nor fanatical in his method. The way in which, in his opening pages, he compares the blunders and the successes, the hits and the misses, of eminent statesmen and writers who have undertaken to predict future events, is at once entertaining and reassuring. He apparently realises in a scientific temper the snares of his enterprise; and rather sets about making a disinterested calculation than about setting up any movement to counteract the tendencies of things. Even to readers who themselves are bent on shaping social tendencies, such a book, written by a man of wide knowledge and ripe judgment, must have a fascination, if they have anything of a philosophical spirit. Dispassionate negative criticism is more profitable reading than the mere whooping about progress which so many "progressives" are apt to indulge in; and scientific reformers, while caring more and not less than do other people about bettering the world, are inclined to set as little store by the semi-scientific fancy of a life of absolute happiness as by the faded dream of heaven and the vision—now ending in smoke—of hell, or the orthodox conception of this world as a painful place of probation for the next. Mr.

Pearson certainly gives small countenance to systematic hopefulness, or elated prediction. He varies a good deal in his attitude—much more, probably, than he realises—but while he shows a good deal of judicial openness in arranging his pros and cons he does distinctly lean to the side of low spirits. And this, as I think we shall see, is only a little less misleading a temper than that of unreflecting high spirits, though it necessarily takes the guise of reflectiveness. Blue spectacles may enable one man to see distinctly where another in a glare of light sees indistinctly; but after all it does not show him things as they are to the normal organism; and if he never takes off his spectacles he may attain a parlous state. But before applying this allegory to Mr. Pearson, let us fully acknowledge how much of real observation has gone to build up his forecast of the course of civilisation. His “croak” is in its way fully abreast of the sociology and politics of the time. When we compare it with such a book as Brown’s ‘Estimate’, which made such a sensation in the eighteenth century, we realise how much of real development in faculty for social science there has been. Brown’s book is the rhetorical and superficial performance of an untrained amateur, suffering from “the” spleen in the age of wigs and fops and boredom: Mr. Pearson’s is the grave and sedately sombre perform-

ance of an expert and hardened student, whose liver has perhaps become a trifle torpid from much sitting over his books in an age of inexhaustible studies.

## II.

Let us hear his main theses. First, the "higher races" are necessarily limited for their field of development to a certain part of the world's surface only, being unable to breed vigorously save in the Temperate Zone. Secondly, the "higher" states are developing towards a "stationary" condition of State Socialism, the consciousness of which, Mr. Pearson thinks, "will produce general discouragement, and will probably affect the intellectual energy of the people concerned". Thirdly, State Socialism will mean increasing national debts, and a perpetuity of great armies, and may lead to national bankruptcy, with concurrent demoralisations of character. Fourthly, "the religion of the family will die out as the religion of the State becomes more and more absorbing," and though this change "*may* be for good *as well as* evil", Mr. Pearson seems to feel more sure about the evil.

The book concludes thus:—

"It is now more than probable that our science, our civilisation, our great and real advance in the practice of government, are only bringing us nearer to the day

when the lower races will predominate in the world, when the higher races will lose their noblest elements, when we shall ask nothing from the day but to live, nor from the future but that we may not deteriorate."

And we have this closing consolation:—

"Even so, there will remain to us ourselves. Simply to do our work in life, and to abide the issue, if we stand erect before the eternal calm as cheerfully as our fathers faced the eternal unrest, may be nobler training for our souls than the faith in progress."

Well, to begin with, I take leave to say that these propositions consist largely of unsound matter, despite the moderation and calmness with which they are enunciated. The two last sentences in particular will bear no analysis. Most of us are personally prepared to contemplate "the eternal calm" with much *more* cheerfulness than our fathers exhibited before "the eternal unrest". Their "faith" was a perpetual disquietude; their literature has three croaks for one of ours; their good spirits were spasmodic, and chronically dashed by Godly fear; and when trouble lacked in the affairs of this life, they more than made up the deficiency by their fears for the life to come. We are more and not less cheerful than they, despite all quasi-pessimistic liver-complainings. And if the world to-day is in many aspects (barring certain masses of its poverty and toil) more cheerful and experimental than it has been for centuries back, no amount of despondency on



Mr. Pearson's part can supply a reason for believing that the future will "ask nothing from the day but to live". As for the "not to deteriorate", has he not just taken it for granted that we are to deteriorate? To which position does he stand?

How, next, does Mr. Pearson prove that the higher races are to lose their "noblest qualities"? He gives no semblance of proof. He does not even define the "noblest qualities". With all his culture and his apparent distaste for claptrap, he is singularly sentimental, surprisingly conventional. Again and again in his pages do we stumble over mere reiterations of the stock platitudes of the pulpit and the parlor. In the introduction we are told that "whatever extends the influence of those races that have taken *their faith from Palestine*, their laws of beauty from Greece, and their civil law from Rome, ought to be matter of rejoicing to Russian, German, Anglo-Saxon, and Frenchman alike". As if the faith from Palestine had not itself had to be progressively civilised towards the vanishing point to make it compatible with civilisation; as if there were no path to beauty save through Greece, or to law save through Rome; and as if moderns had not transcended Greek æsthetics and Roman jurisprudence. This attitude of Mr. Pearson's affects his whole treatise; inasmuch as he clings all along to

the curiously unscientific assumption that the "lower races" must always be "low" relatively to the present "higher" even when the higher have "lost their noblest qualities". And yet, after all, he conceives that the lowered life may yield the "nobler training" for those higher souls!

It is hard to see what Mr. Pearson would have. He pictures the "lower" races as actually progressing now in science, art, and politics. In order to make this clear he is careful to credit them with many good qualities. But as soon as the thesis of their progressiveness is established they become the shadow in the picture; and the "higher" races, including the Russian *monjik*, the English wife-beater and the ground-down docker and factory-worker, the Irish moonlighter, the Spanish bull-fighter, the French peasant of Zola's picture, the Greek and the Italian brigand—all these and their betters are to sigh over the prospect that the Japanese may multiply, and the Chinese become a military power, and the Hindus develop industry and self-government, and the Central and South-American natives learn to manage their own affairs. What is there to lament over? To Mr. Pearson it may sound shockingly unpatriotic to say it; but many of us can contemplate such contingencies with a pleased and curious interest. We find the Japanese to have done wonderful things in art

without knowing the Greeks, and the Chinese to have constructed a durable, if crude, system of law without studying the crudities of the Romans. And we do not see so much to choose between the superstitions of Syria and those of Peru. The best we can hope for all races alike is that they may drop all their superstitions.

And this point of view does not mean any want of real patriotism. It is possible to be unperturbed about the progress of the "lower" races so-called, and at the same time to reject Mr. Pearson's forecast of the decay of the "higher". There is something blandly perverse in the way Mr. Pearson contrives to extract despondency from all things, good and bad. He admits that we seem to be on the way to making an end of poverty, though his notions of the method are not at all clear; but the admission is only a prelude to an attempt to make out that we shall be poorer creatures when we are mostly prosperous than we are when we are mostly poor. What seems to me the fundamental error in Mr. Pearson's sociological method is his unconscious way of imagining the race living in new conditions without developing different critical standards. He writes of a life widely different from that of to-day, and yet he always assumes that he can profitably estimate that life in terms of his own retrospective tastes. It is as if an early Briton or Saxon

or Norman had foreseen the blending of the races not only into a community but into a peaceful community, and had spontaneously recoiled from the vision simply because he was wholly unfitted for such a life.

It can hardly be doubted, surely, that if one of the old fighting feudal barons had been able to forecast the decay of feudalism, the subsequent state of things would have seemed to him ignoble and lamentable. Lytton makes Duke William weep when he thinks that one day the clerks will set their feet on the warriors' corselets. Mr. Pearson takes due note of the fact of old jeremiads over the degeneration of the world, but he really does not read the lesson. He speaks of the world as growing "fibreless"—he is fond of that word—just as the feudal baron might, four hundred years ago. "The world," he sighs,\* with a non-humorous sadness, "is becoming too fibreless, too weak, and too good to contemplate or to carry out great changes which imply lamentable suffering. It trusts more and more to experience; less and less to insight and will." These sentences alone might almost suffice to discredit Mr. Pearson's book, and to stamp his method as only superficially scientific. On his principle, the world has been growing ever more fibreless since

\* Work cited, p. 337.

man began to emerge from ape, if not even before that. It must have been an awful downcome when tribes began to be too fibreless for cannibalism! And yet at this day, despite much lamentable degeneration in town populations, there are thousands of civilised men who could and would readily meet and slay in single combat a primeval cannibal, or an ancient Roman, or a viking, or a feudal knight, or a fire-eater of last century. Our explorers, our hunters, our athletes are as enduring, taking one with another, as were those of any age.

As for the formula that we "trust more and more to experience, less and less to insight and will," it is the very reverse of the historic fact. It was in the most ancient civilised polities that "experience" was most appealed to, that the wisdom of the past was the standard of action. The new political movements to which Mr. Pearson points are a discarding of experience, an appeal to insight and will. And the arbitrariness of Mr. Pearson's conclusions becomes oddly obvious when we note that while thus sighing over the decline of innovating energy he is also desponding over the probable results of radical innovation. Like so many other diffident on-lookers, he is very much afraid about "the family". We are getting timorously anchored to experience; but at the same time we are fool-

hardily cutting our cables! So it is "Heads, decay wins; tails, progress loses". You shall not entrap Mr. Pearson into good spirits, whatever facts you may cite; all is grist for despondency that comes to his mill. A theorem seen to be framed on such a plainly temperamental basis need finally disquiet nobody, however scholarly and reflective be the theorist; and the fallacy we discern in Mr. Pearson's schema we shall find in abundant detail, I think, in his very interesting exposition.

### III.

His idea of the details of the process of decay or standstill in the "higher" civilisation may be stated thus. Industrial pressure will drive the European Governments gradually into some forms of State Socialism, under which they must protect themselves from the industrial competition of the advancing "lower races". They must also restrict their population, inasmuch as the field of their possible development is already seen to be limited to portions of the Temperate Zone. At the same time they must be all highly militarised; because each one must keep up a great standing army in order to protect itself from the rest. There will thus be the minimum of individual initiative and play of character. There will be much less poverty and misery, and

more education ; but all the same the present low popular standards of æsthetics will prevail, and literature and art and drama will stand at a dead level of mediocrity. At the same time the decay of religion, albeit the religion was not true, will take away much of the beauty and elevation of life ; and the family will be less familistic, so to speak ; and all the while the " lower " races, who will be progressing but nevertheless low, will inherit most of the earth.

The fallacy, to my thinking, begins in the premises. That the European States must remain in perpetuity militarist is a monstrous assumption, which Mr. Pearson makes with much nonchalance. He shows in very interesting detail that volunteer armies or militias can never stand against regular armies—the old thesis of Adam Smith ; and he argues that the States of the future must all keep up such armies for self-preservation. But this assumes a perpetual inclination on the part of some or all States to overrun the others ; and such an inclination is already visibly dying out, and likely to disappear rapidly as soon as politics are adjusted to popular and not to class interests. The great evils at present are (1) the survival of certain resentments, in particular that of the French towards the Germans, and (2) the incalculableness of the action of a despotic Government like that of Russia. But it

is hardly conceivable that if France and Germany were socialised, the war spirit would remain as before; and Russia must ere long either regenerate or break up.

There remains the fear of a great military development in China. But there is no such tendency observable in China at present; and why should we assume that it will arise? The most that can be said is that whereas dynastic and nationalistic policy in modern Europe has given rise to great military systems, dynastic policy may do the same in China, which has the disturbing force of a partially-democratic polity close at hand in Japan, and which is further liable to be forced into militarism by the aggressions of European powers. But it is a trifle arbitrary to make this bare possibility a ground for postulating a perpetual necessity of militarism in Europe. Mr. Pearson, who goes on to put the case of China being Mohammedanised and *then* entering on a career of conquest, admits that that is not likely, and that even then China would decay under Islam as other peoples have done. At the worst, the menace of a Chinese irruption would serve rather to unify Europe, by making the various States establish a common army for the common defence. This would be a very different thing from the perpetuity of the present state of mutual distrust. And after all, Mr.



Pearson's own doctrine that only trained armies can stand up against trained armies involves this, that after a long period of peace there will be practically no trained armies, for nothing but warfare can make the really trained soldier. On this view, the Chinese would have to make war *before* they were capable of being a serious danger to Europe; and it would be strange if Europe could not keep up with China, unless China were to develop military strength first of all by purely Asiatic warfare. And in the latter case it is implied that there are other Asiatic powers to keep China in check. Mr. Pearson is really "too previous".

If, then, we quash Mr. Pearson's premiss that European militarism will go hand in hand with European State Socialism, half the basis of his prognosis is gone. There remains his thesis that the average citizen under State Socialism will be a drilled and repressed individuality. But it all depends on what is understood by State Socialism. A Socialism *à la mode* Bismarck, with a monarchic or other species of one-man rule or bureaucratic rule, would no doubt repress individuality; but a democratic Socialism need do no such thing. Mr. Pearson will hardly say that for four-fifths of our population there is much scope for individuality at present. We must mostly work at what lies nearest to hand, and spend most

of our lives in keeping ourselves alive. Few of us have more than a scanty choice of vocation. It must be a poor sort of Socialism that will not give to the immense majority at once much greater leisure and much greater freedom of choice of work. There is at present no provision whatever for developing special capacity among the children of the workers; whereas a rational Socialism would make such provision as a matter of course. Some people who now are quite free to "develop their individuality" anyhow, might under Socialism have to take unwillingly to work; but it does not seem likely that individuality would thereby suffer. There is no more conventional class than that of the idle rich; and the acceptance of the principle of reciprocity of social duty certainly did not make the free States of antiquity, as Athens, poorer in variety of character than either the commercial community of Carthage or that which grew up in Rome after the day of civism was over. Really, once more, the indictment must be quashed: there is "no case".

#### IV.

On the subject of restriction of population, in turn, Mr. Pearson is extremely unconvincing. He quite recognises the necessity of such restriction, in respect of the misery of the present pro-

cess of blind multiplication ; but he cannot bring himself to think of the prudential state with complacency. He conceives of it, to begin with, as forced on by the industrial competition of the Chinese and Hindus—a probable development which Mr. Pearson seems to have surmised independently, but which has been very acutely proposed also by Mr. J. A. Hobson. The white man, says Mr. Pearson,\*

“will be driven from every neutral market and forced to confine himself within his own. Ultimately he will have to conform to the Oriental standard of existence, or, and this is the probable solution, to stunt the increase of population. If he does this by methods that are *inconsistent with morality*, the very life-springs of the race will be tainted. If he does it by a patient self-restraint that shows itself in a *limitation to late marriages*, national character will be unimpaired, but material decline will have commenced. *With civilisation equally diffused*, the most populous country must ultimately be the most powerful; and the preponderance of China over any rival—even over the United States of America—is likely to be overwhelming.”

This is a startling complication of fallacy and prejudice. To begin with, Mr. Pearson offers as the only alternative means of restriction to late marriages, “methods that are inconsistent with morality”. Either he knows nothing of the provisions of medical science in this regard, which seems inconceivable, or he intends to characterise prudential methods as inconsistent with morality.

\* *Id.* pp. 129-130.

and as tainting the very life-springs of the nation. We must presume that that is his drift. On the other hand he deliberately recommends late marriages. That is to say, he recommends men to wait till middle age or later, and then to marry young women—for Mr. Pearson must needs be aware that middle-aged women cannot begin to bear children at all without special risk. Meantime young men and maidens are to be celibate; more women than ever, proportionately, are to become old maids; and the young men are to have before them the normal spectacle of elderly men with young wives. And this, forsooth, is the method that is "consistent with morality" and that best preserves untainted "the very life-springs of the nation"!

If Mr. Pearson were not visibly a well-read and thoughtful writer, it would be difficult to take him seriously after such a deliverance as this. He is propounding the mere tradition of Grundyism and unreasoning prejudice. He is recommending, two generations after Malthus, a course the prescription of which the wisest followers of Malthus have seen to be ruinous to morals, to family happiness, and to the cause of prudential restraint. It is the course which breeds the maximum of vice, the maximum of prostitution, the maximum of divorce, and the maximum of physical degeneration. The way

to raise a healthy race is not to breed solely from elderly fathers, often half worn-out by the struggle of life. The way to promote healthy morality is not to separate men and maidens in the years of their bloom and their highest vitality, or to wed maidens to men of twice their age. The right way is to encourage early marriage and moderately postponed and limited parentage. And the sociologist who calls this method "inconsistent with morality" is on this head a blind guide, whose notion of morality is a decoction from the platitudes of pietists and prudes.

As to the preponderance of China, finally, Mr. Pearson stultifies himself. If civilisation is to be "equally diffused", what becomes of his distinction between the "higher" and "lower" races, and his lamentation over the spread of the latter? Really, the principle of "Heads, decay wins, tails, progress loses," is a trifle too transparent.

One is led to suspect from other passages that Mr. Pearson's moral inspiration comes a good deal from conventional religiosity. One of his ingeminations runs\* :—

"It is conceivable that our later world may find itself deprived of all that it valued on earth, of the pageantry of subject provinces (!) and the reality of commerce,

\* *Id.* p. 131

while it has neither a disinterested literature to amuse it, nor a vitalised religion to give it spiritual strength."

And, again, while arguing that city-life lowers physique, he takes for granted that city-life will more and more predominate even under a system of Socialism, with the result that the prevailing type of citizen will be

"the Manchester or Bellevue operative, with an horizon narrowed to parochial limits, with no interests except those of the Factory or the Trades-Union" [this under Socialism!]; "with the faith of the Salvation Army, that finds expression in antics and buffoonery, *or* with that even more lamentable scepticism to which, the bestial element in man is the only reality."<sup>‡</sup>

Why, in the name of considerate controversy, does Mr. Pearson present only such alternatives as these? Is he at bottom so vulgar a sentimentalist that he can conceive of no rationalism, no scepticism, save that which takes account only of "the bestial element in man"? Does he mean to imply that popular rationalism must needs tend to the bestial, even as popular religion tends to buffoonery? If so, he had need say little about the tainting of the life-springs of the nation. He himself in that case represents such a taint; and his perpetual harping on depravation as the natural outcome of progress, will take rank as an attempt to carry the taint into other intelligences.

<sup>‡</sup>*Id.* p. 156.

## V.

This habit of assuming that only religion can give "spiritual strength" to culture, and this readiness to assume that an admittedly rational scepticism is worse than an insane religion, prepare us to find Mr. Pearson treating actual unbelievers with little conscientiousness. In one of his historical passages\* he rises to the height of admitting that "no administration finds it necessary in these days to protect the convictions of its citizens from deliberate insult, except in the rare cases where the Church is practically stronger than the State". He goes on:—

"To all appearance the liberty granted might with safety be greater than it is. The line of demarcation between the late Dr. Matthew Arnold comparing the Trinity to three Lord Shaftesburys, and the late Mr. Bradlaugh comparing it to a monkey with three tails, is rather one of literary style than of reverence; and it is difficult to see why the two offenders were so differently punished. Meanwhile it is instructive to notice that these two sallies of irreverence, and a few lines by Mr. Swinburne, are all that represent the sacrilegious spirit in Englishmen who have taken any noticeable place among their countrymen during the last fifty years, though the temper of the times is believed to be sceptical, and even aggressively irreligious."

Now, the story of Mr. Bradlaugh is only a reckless revival of an old untruth. It was floated first by the *Saturday Review* in 1867. Mr. Brad-

\* *Id.* p. 201.

laugh wrote to that organ of piety and decency, pointing out that the phrase in question was not his; but his letter was not inserted. Like other falsehoods on behalf of faith, this one flourished, and now Mr. Pearson gives it a fresh start in the interests of the sentimental religion of the *fin de siècle*. In relating the outrageous proceedings of the early English reformers he is careful to give his authorities. On the allusion to "the late Dr. Matthew Arnold" he is careful to give the page in "Literature and Dogma". But in telling a story against a leading Atheist he feels that no evidence is necessary, and he does not pretend to give any. To this complexion may a careful historian come, under the inspiration of sentimentality and liver complaint. Can it be that Mr. Pearson was on the staff of the *Saturday Review* in that "golden prime" when the charter of freedom was that no gentleman need behave like a gentleman to those whom he did not like?

The historical basis of the monkey story is this. In the *National Reformer* of February 17, 1867, a contributor with the initials J. P. A. avowedly reproduced from memory a humorous discourse of Charles Southwell, in which a monkey was represented as speaking of the cosmos in terms of monkey perceptions. It began: "A race of monkeys once inhabited the depths of a gloomy forest;" and told how there arose a class



who imposed upon the rest. These are represented as giving to their dupes a certain body of doctrine, of which the specially offending passage runs: "There is a great big monkey sitting upstairs in the clouds, and he has his all-seeing eye upon you; and oh! brethren, mind the whisk of his long tail. An old monkey of our tribe saw it once: it had three ends and only one top, and the stump was like three, and the ends were one." It will be seen here that the idea is not to "*compare* the Trinity to a monkey with three tails", but to burlesque theistic anthropomorphism by making a monkey conceive of a monkey-God in terms of the human delusion. This is really a reproduction of a classic criticism of Theism; and Heine in 'Atta Troll' similarly makes the bear conceive of a bear-God. The attack is not specially on the Trinity. Southwell, as it happens, did not speak of "three tails". But that is a minor matter. The main point is that Mr. Bradlaugh was not the speaker at all; and that in giving space to the passage in his journal he was doing just what he might have done for a translation from 'Atta Troll' if it had occurred to James Thomson (who commented on the matter in reply to the *Saturday Review* in a later issue) to cite Heine's verse as being to the same purpose. As for the "punishment" of which Mr. Pearson speaks, I am at a loss to guess what he

means; unless it be that he regards the persecution of Mr. Bradlaugh as led up to by the story of the three-tailed monkey, which he now starts afresh. It was certainly often used against Mr. Bradlaugh in his earlier political life.

It is a pity that a writer like Mr. Pearson should thus put himself in the wrong with people who lay store by honor and scrupulosity in controversy. But his action is edifying as showing how essentially perverse and pernicious is the sentimental tradition about religion which is his main lead to a gloomy prognosis of human life without religion. In this frame of mind, we see once more, a man comes to make as light of evidence as he does of real probability. The sociologist who, by reason of prejudice, cannot or will not guard against false testimony on contemporary matters, can scarcely inspire confidence when he predicts the future.

It would perhaps be attributing too much scope to religious sentiment in itself to set down Mr. Pearson's forebodings to his religious consciousness: the chances are that the root of the matter lies in his physique: but in any case religious sentiment is one of the main channels of his despondency. He puts on his title-page, as motto, the line in "Faust" thrown after the departing student by Mephistopheles:—

*"Dir wird gewiss einmal bei deiner Gottähnlichkeit bange;"*

of which cryptic utterance he judiciously offers no translation. In what sense does he understand it? It would seem, in that of Martin's translation,

"And with that likeness of yours to God, your heart is like to break,"

which is a very loose rendering indeed.\* The true sense lends itself ill to Mr. Pearson's thesis. Mephistopheles has given the student a fine handful of Mephistophelean advice, and has written in his book the motto: *Eritis sicut Deus, scientes*

\*I have had the curiosity to compare the versions of several of the translators. Bayard Taylor widely diverges from the sense:—

"Follow the ancient text, and the snake thou wast ordered to trample!

With all thy likeness to God, thou'lt yet be a sorry example!"

In the German there is nothing whatever about being "ordered to trample". Mr. Hayward, who made a good many blunders of his own (*e.g.*, rendering "Chorus of Disciples", by "Chorus of Young People") while pointing out the blunders of others, is just a little better. He has: ". . . some time or other you, with your likeness to God, will be sorry enough." Miss Swanwick, though falling into sad diffuseness under the exigencies of rhyme and rhythm, is also better:

"And with your likeness to the Gods, poor fool

Ere long be sure your poor sick heart will quake".

Anster is wrong and clumsy:

"A weary man thy likeness to the Gods will of thee make".

Thus three translators have made bad verses to find a rhyme to "snake", as Goethe used an awkward idiom to find a rhyme to "Schlange"; and a fourth translator, following the original metre, throws the original text to the winds.

*bonum et malum*: "Ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil"; and when the youth goes he calls after him, "Follow the old saying, and my cousin the serpent, and you will certainly yet get a fright with (or be sorry for) your Godlikeness". In other words, "Go on, young man, your Godlikeness will startle you yet". What bearing has this on the exposition of 'National Character: a Forecast'? A variant version which would serve very well as an answer to Mr. Pearson would be: "Your Godism has led you into a sad funk!"

## VI.

At times, it must be said, Mr. Pearson seems to see clearly enough that human nature is capable of evolving higher moral principles for itself as it rises to higher planes of civilisation. He calculates† that, when population everywhere has to become stationary

"the spirit of uncalculating devotion to the common cause, which even in our own days has changed the face of half Europe and rescued society from dissolution (!) in North America, will become a steady principle of action, deserving to be accounted a faith, and lifting all who feel it into a higher life".

This way of speaking about a modern civil war—as if there were not plenty of earlier civil wars

† *Id.* p. 226.

—is strained enough ; but the passage recognises that devotion to the commonweal may socially do all that religions have been supposed to do. Mr. Pearson at the same time† demurs to what he supposes to be a satirical account given by Matthew Arnold of the ethical tuition given in the French schools, in which the scholar answers catechetically that “the State” has given him all he enjoys. Mr. Pearson, following Mr. Hamerton, explains that “the country” is the phrase, and not “the State”. But Arnold in his report actually quoted the French word, “*la patrie*,” and he did not “ridicule” or “denounce” or “condemn” the idea, as Mr. Pearson seems to imply ; but admitted that it strongly impressed him when he had been “languidly” listening to a lesson. So it would seem that after all we may reasonably reckon on a higher development of social feeling, Arnold permitting !

All the while, however, Mr. Pearson is determined that we shall not be happy under the coming regimen. He speaks of the “stationary” state of population as inevitably a dull one, contrasting it with the coming “Black and Yellow Belt . . . all teeming with life”.\* Then does life “teem” only when there is over-population ? And will not even the blacks and the yellows one

† *Id.* p. 224.\* *Id.* p. 130.

day have to learn to be "stationary"? Mr. Pearson refuses to be comforted:—

"Can anyone suppose that, in such a condition of political society, the habitual temper of mind in Europe would not be profoundly changed? Depression, hopelessness, *a disregard of invention and improvement*, would replace the sanguine confidence of races that at present are always panting for new worlds to conquer. Here and there, it may be, the more adventurous would profit by the tradition of old supremacy (!) to get their services accepted (!) in the new nations, but as a rule there *would be no outlet for energy, no future for statesmanship*. The despondency of the English people, when their dream of conquest in France was dissipated, was attended with a complete decay of thought, with civil war, and with a standing still or perhaps a decline of population, and to a less degree of wealth."

What a demonstration! And what an obstinate inversion of the plain lesson that it is the lust of conquest, the debauch of imperialism, that *works* decadence and entails despair! The beaten and half-barbarous England of Harry the Sixth is a forecast of the sanely controlled England of the future, peopled up to the limit of wisdom, and full of ordered strength and knowledge! What "thought" was there to "decay" in the England of the days of Agincourt? And what caused the revival? Mr. Pearson thinks there was hardly any "quickenings of the national pulse with real life" till the reign of Elizabeth; and *that* he traces to "possibilities of *golden conquest* in America", the revival of Greek letters, "and a

new faith that seemed to thrust aside the curtain drawn by priests, and to open heaven". So, since the future thrusting aside of the priests' curtain is not to be done by a "faith" sufficiently irrational, and as there are no new hemispheres to conquer, and no "disinterred literature" or "vitalised religion" in prospect, we must needs lack "spiritual strength" and "amusement". There can be no statesmanship without conquest or colonies, and no sphere for energy at home. Is this sociology or dyspepsia?

Certainly some of Mr. Pearson's estimates and comments on the dangers of the present course of things are just. His survey of the tendencies of population in North America and the Tropical Belt is in itself fresh and instructive. Even some of his apprehensions, such as those of increasing indebtedness among States, and downward tendencies in literatures, are sufficiently well-founded in the actual state of affairs. The flaw in his demonstration always arises in respect of the persistent assumption that the admittedly bad tendencies of the present situation will positively be aggravated under a socio-political regimen widely different from the present one. Thus he decides: "That nations will plunge deeper and deeper into indebtedness as the State becomes more and more industrial seems not unlikely". Why? The present indebtedness has been in-

curred under an essentially individualistic system, in which national and municipal debts are encouraged by whole classes, who see in such debts a good means of investing their accumulated credits. But is it to be believed that as civism supersedes class politics, such indebtedness will be similarly encouraged, any more than the militarism which Mr. Pearson so arbitrarily takes for granted?

The same query arises in regard to the future of culture. Mr. Pearson infers that because at present, under a regimen of grinding competition and over-toil and over-population, popular culture and amusements tend to the trivial and the cheap, they will show the same characteristics under a system of increasing civism, leisure, and prudential restraint of population. This is to assume that radically changed conditions will make no change in results. On the other hand, Mr. Pearson very readily anticipates changed results from changed conditions when it is his object to prognose decay. He starts\* with a conviction that literature is already decaying, observing that

"the contrast between the English school of free thought which moulded religious enlightenment in the eighteenth century, and the utter sterility of our literature in the nineteenth, except for a single name, is sufficiently remarkable".

\* *Id.* p. 100.



This seems to refer to the literature of rationalism in religion, since we have next an endorsement of Heine's remark

"that the most stupid Englishman can talk sensibly about politics, and that it is impossible to extract anything but nonsense from the best educated Englishman when religion is discussed".

There is a good deal of truth in this, which was also noted by Emerson, and in Mr. Pearson's further remark that

"the results of Biblical criticism in Germany have never been tolerated in England till they were so nearly superseded in their native country (!) as to appear comparatively conservative; and even the scientific conclusions of the Englishman Darwin were being disseminated in text-books on the continent while English society was reading refutations of them, or at best taking refuge in half-hearted attempts to reconcile the doctrine of evolution with the teaching of Genesis."

But even here Mr. Pearson overlooks the forces of change. English "respectable" opacity to new ideas is great; and the reaction after the French Revolution lasted long; but there has never been a cessation of the spirit of free thought. James Mill and Bentham upheld it even in the thick of the reaction; George Eliot translated Strauss and Feuerbach; Owen conjoined the ideals of truth and justice for the workers; Spencer on one line, Mill on another, Arnold on another, and Mr. Morley on yet an-

other, have sapped the orthodoxy of thousands; Renan has been popularised; Bradlaugh for a whole generation labored gigantically on the popular Freethought platform, bringing a new note and a new force wherever he went; and, may it not be added, Freethought journalism has all the while disseminated rational knowledge and criticism among the thousands of the more thoughtful. And if we are so to improve our life conditions that oppressive poverty and oppressive toil are to be made an end of, is it conceivable that the stolid hostility of the old "respectable" classes to new ideas will be long maintained? Is it not now showing a hundred symptoms of decay? And is it not over that very decay, finally, that Mr. Pearson intones one of his divers jeremiads?

It would not be going too far to suggest that Mr. Pearson himself partly typifies the "sterility" and wooden orthodoxy he professes to deplore. He is always falling back on a semi-maudlin religious sentiment which is far more akin to stagnation and effeminacy than to hardy progress. Ever and anon he drops a conciliatory platitude about "God." As thus:—

"A clearer insight into some fragment of the Divine order—something to assure us of eternal sympathy behind eternal power—may mean the bringing back

of a faith which once was salutary, and which the world seems poorer for needing."

You are poor if you feel so; but Mr. Pearson has no right to impute his thinness of blood and poverty of spirit to others; nor is the man who harps on this note much entitled to deplore the "sterility" of his time on the side of rationalism.

In his literary criticism, though always readable and well-read, and often suggestive, Mr. Pearson is similarly inconclusive on the side of his pessimism. His most hopeful forecast sets out thus†:—

"While it seems unavoidable that science should come to appear less and less a revelation from God (!), and that poetry should degenerate into mere literary bric-à-brac, such as the composition of rondels and triolets now is, there are two departments of thought in which it would seem that the human mind may look for compensation—history and criticism."

This is some comfort. But the sigh is supererogatory. The revival of rondels and triolets was in vogue for only a few years, and the fashion is already almost extinct; the present tendency being much more towards freer forms of verse. Mr. Pearson is not quite up to date. Nor does his appreciation of Ibsen make him realise the potentialities of new literary adventure which that great artist incarnates, and which are being further revealed in an immense mass of con-

† *Id.* p. 302.

tinental and even English literature, visibly full of the promise and the spirit of change and reconstruction. In fine, half of Mr. Pearson's lamentations may be met and quashed by the declaration of Whitman, that every generation can best get its credentials from the highest source, namely, itself. If our men and women will but breed healthy children and give them fair chances of growth, all prognostications of their decay will be to them in the coming generations as dead leaves to be trodden under foot.

And this is the sufficient answer, in particular, to Mr. Pearson's dismal speculation over that somewhat platitudinous theme, "the family". He balances old evils against possible evils, admitting the old, or some of them, but vaguely fearing that there are evils to come which may somehow be worse. Always the drift is the same, to suggest that as people come to live more rationally they will somehow live to worse purpose. And this attitude of mind, which in itself is not very different from that of the average bewailer of the good old times, is sought to be fortified by much conventional allusion on the one hand to traditional virtue, to "the Puritan family"—that meagre school of fruitless austerity and of bad temper parading as piety—and to the "honor" of ancestry; and on the other hand by not very candid allusions to "legalised concubin-

age", and so forth. It would be easy to meet Mr. Pearson's pejorative reflections by a destructive analysis of the vices of the ideal and the practice of orthodox marriage and family life in all ages; but it is not worth while. Neither is it necessary to meet at any length his facile conclusion\* that under a socialised State would-be reformers will "inevitably" have to be silent to escape ostracism. The world has heard some such predictions as these in every age since society began. And if in the latter-day past the event has in the main or in the end falsified the prediction, there is little audacity in deciding that the future will be as able to grapple with its problems and its dangers as the past has been. Even Mr. Pearson's sombre book is in itself a promise of betterment. He does his croaking so much more reflectively and instructively than his predecessors that he proves an advance in human capacity even while he is trying to establish its decadence.

\* *Id.* p. 286.

## INVERTED SOCIOLOGY.

(1894.)

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No experienced reader will be quick to apply to a book, unless perhaps it be of poems, the principle that the animal is to be divined from a claw. Still, there are some claws that go a long way to discount the work of anatomy. And when, early in a work professedly of scientific sociology, we find such a sentence as this—

“The time is certainly not far distant when she” [*i.e.*, “science”] “must look back with surprise, if not indeed with shamefacedness, to the attitude in which she has for long addressed herself to one of the highest problems” [*i.e.*, the significance of religion] “in the history of life”—

we are much tempted to make up our minds there and then as to the possible value of the whole performance. Mr. Benjamin Kidd, in whose ‘Social Evolution’\* the passage occurs, claims explicitly and implicitly to be above all things a scientific writer, with a “scientific mind”; and yet he thus figures “science” to himself as a sort of entity capable of misbehaving herself in certain directions, and of repenting thereof, like the Deity of the Jews. It turns out that by “science” in the passage cited Mr. Kidd means a certain number of scientific men, typified perhaps by Mr. Huxley; and he would at times seem to

\* London: Macmillan and Co., p. 18.

represent his own book as beginning a return of "science" to a proper frame of mind, even as a Hebrew prophet might forecast the reform of "Israel" under his guidance. Yet in another passage† he speaks of Professor Marshall's 'Principles of Economics'—after calling it a "worthy attempt to place the science on a firmer foundation" by relating it to sociology—as "a somewhat *belated* attempt to explain social phenomena which political economists at first ignored"—"the *effort of a department of science* to recover ground which it has lost largely through its own faults". To some readers, perhaps, such a way of seeing things will seem so far from puzzle-headed that they may endorse the press notices which ascribe to Mr. Kidd's book a great amount of scientific depth. And though it really testifies to a profound confusion of mind, it is necessary to take some pains to show this to a large portion of Mr. Kidd's probable audience.

"Science," to begin with, is simply a convenient way of naming either what we believe to be systematised and verified knowledge, or the process by which such knowledge is brought to system and verification; and if Mr. Kidd were truly a scientific man he would see that an advance such as he supposes he makes from one

† *Id.* p. 24.

view to a truer one, is simply a fresh scientific sifting of scientific matter. If his view is right, it will be science for to-morrow; or at least those who share his view will rank it as science. If on the other hand I can convince anybody that Mr. Kidd is ill-informed and ill-judging, the views by which I may contrive to supersede his will be science for those who receive them. I can understand disputants calling each other unscientific; but I cannot explain a professedly scientific writer charging "science" with blundering, save on the view that he is himself a blundering thinker. And the blunder is so gratuitous. It is so much easier, as well as saner, to argue that Smith and Jones are scientifically astray, and that "science" must disown them.

The line on which I have approached Mr. Kidd's book takes us, I think, to the heart of his position. He has a grievance against "science" in respect that he believes certain scientific men, discussing religion, have been content to declare it to be "without any foundation in reason". He puts it\* that—

"Strange to say, science seems to have taken up, and to have maintained, down to the present time, the extraordinary position that her only concern with [the religions of men] is to declare (often, it must be confessed, with the heat and bitterness of a partisan) that they are without any foundation in reason."

\* *Id.* p. 20.



I cannot guess with any confidence what persons Mr. Kidd has here in view when he reproaches "science". The demonstration of the irrationality of religion is one part of science. But I can think of no scientific men, and of no rationalists, who limit their thinking to that process of demonstration. The further demonstrations that religion arose and developed under certain conditions, and that it has reacted in certain ways on human history, are as common as the first. Hume, D'Holbach, Diderot, Voltaire, Volney, Dupuis, Comte, Gibbon, Godwin, Mill, Buckle, Morley, Lecky, Huxley, Clifford, Gruppe, Strauss, Büchner, Spencer, Tylor, Draper—to take only the well-known names—have all discussed the effects of religion on human life more or less fully. Mr. Kidd seems to have his eye on Mr. Grant Allen. But Mr. Grant Allen, it is safe to say, has very distinct views as to the effects of religion on social evolution. Mr. Kidd's "science" is a chimera.

The real ground of Mr. Kidd's displeasure is to be seen between his lines. His anger has waxed hot against "science" because scientific men commonly assume that to prove religion to be irreconcilable with reason is sufficient to lead reasonable people to disbelieve in it. Mr. Kidd's own main sociological theory is, briefly, to the effect that irrational religion is an essential factor

in "social evolution", in the sense of progress in civilisation; and that "reason" is injurious, and tends to be fatal, to such progress, because "there is no rational sanction for the conditions of progress". He is, in fact, that perishing psychological type, a proselytising Irrationalist, professing to follow scientific or rational methods in all his demonstrations of the wrongness of Reason. And inasmuch as it is impossible to be really scientific, that is rational, in Irrationalism (since the Irrationalist principle negates the very process of persuasion by proof), Mr. Kidd's feeling towards the real Rationalists is necessarily one of pure temperamental or emotional aversion—as much so as that of De Maistre towards Voltaire. It is easy to show this; and it may be well to do so at the outset. A few of Mr. Kidd's early deliverances supply the proof, and at the same time reveal the hopeless inconsistency of his own mental attitude. After confessing\* to some "impatience" at the "triviality and comparative insignificance" of Mr. Spencer's explanations of the early development of religion, Mr. Kidd writes:—

"His disciples have only followed in the same path. We find Mr. Grant Allen, one of the most devoted of them. . . . going so far as to speak of a charac-

\* *Id.* p. 22.

teristic feature of the higher forms of religion as so much 'grotesque fungoid growth' which has clustered round the primeval thread of Ancestor Worship. Neither Mr. Grant Allen nor any other evolutionist would dream of describing the mammalian brain as a grotesque fungoid growth which had clustered round the primitive dorsal nerve; yet such language would not be more short-sighted than that which is here used in discussing a feature of the most distinctive (!) class of phenomena which the evolution of society presents."

Observe the argument—or let us say the doctrine—here. It is thought to be decisive as against Mr. Allen to call his view "short-sighted"; yet it is plain that if Mr. Allen had called the religions "short-sighted" instead of "grotesque" or "fungoid", Mr. Kidd would have been just as much displeased with him, though Mr. Kidd does not once, I think, affect to believe that the religions are true. In other words, irrational religions are to be discussed as no less objective data for science than the mammalian brain; but the views of rationalists on religion are not such data, and are merely to be brushed aside for ever as "short-sighted". That is, Mr. Kidd is free to pass an ethical or culturistic judgment on the sociology of Mr. Allen, but Mr. Allen is to be scientifically barred from passing an ethical or culturistic judgment on religions. And all the while Mr. Kidd himself is bringing a strictly ethical or culturistic judgment—and an extremely prejudiced one at that—to bear on civilisations

in general and in particular. Heads, he wins; tails, rationalism loses.

Let there be no misunderstanding as to the rationalistic, that is the scientific, position in the matter. To pass an ethical or rational criticism on religion as "grotesque" is clearly not the whole business of the scientific critic. On Mr. Kidd's own showing, Mr. Spencer discussed the growth of religion very much as he would the growth of the mammalian brain; and to say that Mr. Allen's phrase about a "grotesque fungoid growth" follows "in the same path" is really a very bad paralogism. Mr. Kidd first attacks Mr. Spencer for coldly anatomising religion, and then attacks Mr. Allen for calling it names. Vetoing both methods, he has weight against neither. Both methods are in fact alike valid, whatever we may decide as to the completeness of the results or the fitness of the terms in which they are stated. Mr. Spencer's explanation may be inadequate, but it is a scientific attempt. Mr. Grant's phrase about a "fungoid growth" may be inappropriate as marking off religion unwarrantably from, say, politics or customs, even as Mr. Kidd (very much more crudely) calls religions "the most distinctive class of phenomena"; but it expresses what Mr. Kidd's book does not, an attitude of mind quite consistent with rational ethics. For the spontaneous protest of the

cultivated reason against the perpetuation of the methods of unreason is, to say the least, as justifiable an instinct as any. And his emotional incapacity to see as much, in other words his personal equation, is the fatal defect of Mr. Kidd, who is always undertaking to justify fundamental psychological instincts, and yet always vetoing the most fundamental and the most irresistible of all.

Let us take another concrete illustration Mr. Kidd writes\* :—

“It would be a great mistake to view now as representative of the time the aggressive and merely destructive form of unbelief which finds expression in England in opinions like those of the late Mr. Charles Bradlaugh, and in America in the writings and addresses of Colonel Ingersoll. Even with regard to the views of the new party of Agnostics, representing what may be called unbelief in a passive state, a current of change may be discerned in progress. The militant onslaughts of so cultured a representative as Professor Huxley, the founder of the party, do not find the response in men’s minds they would have found at a previous time. They are, almost unconsciously, recognised as belonging to a phase of thought beyond which the present generation feels itself, in some way, to have moved. The general mind, so often more scientific than our current science, seems to feel that there is something wrong in the attitude of science towards this subject of religion, that the most persistent and universal class of phenomena connected with human society cannot be thus” [how?] “lightly disposed of, and that our religious systems must have some un-

\* *Id.* p. 16.

explained function to perform in the evolution which society is undergoing, and on a scale to correspond with the magnitude of the phenomena."

I will not object to Mr. Kidd's very consistent resort to the suffrage, as estimated by himself, of the so-called "scientific" general multitude, as settling the point against "science"; but I have to point out that in this passage he destroys his own philosophy twice over. He expressly represents the multitude as divining that "our religious systems" must have a "function" (his own view of the matter), and as adhering for that reason to some or all of the said systems; when all through the book he intermittently argues that irrationality, or spontaneous belief, is the condition of vital religion. Belief that religion fulfils a "function" is a profoundly different frame of mind from religious belief, which is an emotional conviction that the dicta of a religion are true. To speak of religion as fulfilling a function is so far to rationalise. Then even the "general mind" is already working in part on the lines of reason, which Mr. Kidd undertakes to show are fatal to "social evolution". So that, just as Mr. Kidd's own mind is in a condition of unstable equilibrium, a condition incompatible with sincere and energetic action, the public as which he appeals is on his own showing in the same state.

But that is not all. Supposing it to be true that the multitude, as well as Mr. Kidd, are thus resting intellectually on their mental apices, or supposing the position to be more favorably described, nothing would thereby be proved for his or their rightness of direction. The notion that religion has a "function to fulfil" was never more popular than in the decaying ages of Græco-Roman Paganism. Not only is this notion itself not primarily religious: it may not have attached itself to the right "religion". Mr. Kidd is at great pains to reiterate the established ethical platitudes about the downfall of ancient civilisation. On the other hand, just before his hostile reference to "aggressive and merely destructive unbelief", he has oddly committed himself to the statement that "a general deep-lying religiousness", which he puts as the same thing with "a remarkable earnestness", is "often not less marked amongst those openly rejecting the dogmas of religion". Then may not this be the religion that is to win the day? Mr. Bradlaugh was a man of remarkable earnestness, if ever there has been one in our day. It would indeed be difficult to express the difference between his intensely rational yet intensely temperamental conviction, and the swoon of self-drugged volition which passes for philosophy with Mr. Kidd. Putting aside for the moment

the question of the biological relation between the earnestness of religious faith and the earnestness of "aggressive unbelief"—a primordial problem which Mr. Kidd does not even perceive, much less solve—I would ask Mr. Kidd what he means by treating "aggressive unbelief" as a phenomenon of no account? If Mr. Allen is "short-sighted" in his view that religions are a "fungoid growth", what is to be said of Mr. Kidd's view that aggressive unbelief is as yesterday's breeze? Is reasoned Atheism a less noteworthy objective datum than Fetichism, Priapism, Sufism, Catholicism, Mormonism, or Mallockism? Is it not, to use his own confused words, "a factor of some kind in the social evolution which is in progress"?

It is probably not worth while to meet this self-destroying sophistry with counter-allegation where it resorts to simple aspersion. Those who can be confused by it will not care much about truth in detail. But so long as there are reputable writers who vend that cheap formula about "aggressive and merely destructive unbelief", it must be somebody's business to expose its falsehood and its folly. For practical and popular purposes, it is an untruth, and it is a cowardly untruth. The term "aggressive" is here used as one of blame by men who count aggressiveness a virtue in persons of their own way of



thinking. Mr. Kidd is himself an "aggressive" Irrationalist, not to say an aggressive reactionist. The early Christians whom he extols were aggressive to the point of insanity. Aggressiveness is the specific characteristic of the religious spirit which he represents as the main force in modern progress. I am moved to call it a proof of the inalienable element of baseness in the religious temper, that pietists and Irrationalists thus impute as a fault to their antagonists what they claim as a merit in themselves. If it be not a baseness, it is a childishness that yields the fruits of baseness. And it is an incurable childishness that keeps professed philosophers talking of "merely destructive unbelief". If there is any kind of unbelief that could reasonably receive that name it is the paralytic unbelief in reason avowed by writers like Mr. Kidd; but I have never found that such unbelief destroyed anything but its own credit.

As for the unbelief typified by Mr. Bradlaugh, it was "constructive" in the highest degree. Scientifically speaking, contagious unbelief cannot but be constructive. You cannot drive a false belief out of a man's mind without giving him a belief in its place. You cannot destroy the belief that a flood covered the whole earth, or that Jesus raised the dead, or that one Moses wrote the Pentateuch, or that the Bible is a good ethi-

cal guide, without setting up in their place a scientific belief resting on real knowledge, a belief that Christian miracle stories are on a par with Pagan miracle stories, a belief that the Pentateuch was written by many hands, a belief that Bible morality is often detestable, and that we have better ideas to-day. Whately, albeit an archbishop, was able to see that every belief is negative or destructive in that it negates its contrary. Mr. Kidd, with a smattering of Darwinism, is less fortunate. And I am bound to confess that his blindness is shared by some professed Positivists, who quote Comte's "*On ne détruit que ce qu'on remplace*" in the same breath with a complaint that Atheists destroy without replacing. Of the same species are those other persons who profess to detest "negative teachings" while revering the Ten Commandments. It is surely time they were all intellectually gathered to their fathers.

To return to the concrete question. *Is the "general mind" at one with Mr. Kidd's?* And if it were, what would its acquiescence certify, as to either the truth or the expediency of his doctrine? To answer the last question first, the acquiescence would merely signify that an overworked, unstudious, and superficially cultured generation gave its ignorant vote for a doctrine in harmony with its ignorance and its mood, just

as the age of Pagan ignorance and decay turned towards the mongrel cults of the East, as best suited to emotional ignorance and the spirit of servitude. But the facts are quite otherwise than as Mr. Kidd alleges; and indeed his untrustworthiness as to historic fact in all ages is only less marked than his zest in fallacy. The "general mind" of the day, as distinguished from the intelligence of the studious minority, is either turning away from religion in simple apathy or turning blindly to the more exciting forms of religion. On the one hand we have popular indifference; on the other hand, popular worships. In all "Christian" countries alike, a growing indifference to religion is complained of by the mass of the clergy; and only the differential worships, so to speak, claim any progress. That is to say, in the Protestant countries the Catholic Church gains ground, so that in North and Middle Germany it flourishes relatively to a Protestantism that is disappearing; but in the Catholic countries Catholicism itself visibly loses its hold on life.

And one general law unifies the phenomena. The most religious religion, so to speak, will attract the more religious temperaments—that is, the irrational or pietistic temperaments; and in England we see Catholicism and the High Church attract these types among the educated, as the Salvation Army attracts them among the

uneducated. But the mass of average intelligence everywhere gravitates towards simple secularity, in the primary sense of a concern for the enjoyment of life or the prosecution of personal interests; and this substantially owing to a lapse from the old beliefs, partly brought about by direct or "aggressive" criticism and partly by the indirect influence of modern culture and modern preoccupation. The over-busy age recoils from an outworn creed to the physical life (now cultivated more widely and energetically in the north of Europe than it has been for centuries before), and also to intellectual stimulation as distinguished from study. Thus we have the correlative facts of multiplying athletics and multiplying light literature. But all this implies no development of such a way of thinking as Mr. Kidd's, to any extent nearly commensurate with the old scope of the faith which is disappearing. Among the studious and scientific minority, opinion runs either towards "aggressive" rationalism—the wholesomest phase of all—or towards a rationalism which takes the disappearance of religion as a matter of course, and merely shrugs its shoulders alike at irrational pietism and the perverse Irrationalism which, as in Mr. Kidd's book, suicidally undertakes to reinstate unreason by reasoning that it pays mankind to be unreasonable.

Such a book, plainly, can seem impressive only to minds unable to disentangle even a gross fallacy, or to minds in the position of wanting a show of philosophic covering for a cherished absurdity. Such a demand has been felt in many periods, ancient and modern; and any writing which meets it will of course be so far welcome. A ready reception was given of old to the mysticisms which glossed over the grossnesses of polytheism; and in our own century to the diffuse and internecine sophistries of Coleridge, whose teaching is a pathological alternation of two directly antagonistic lines of doctrine. And there can be no better proof of the philosophic inefficiency of Mr. Kidd than his evident ignorance of the fact that he is maintaining one of the commonest theses in culture history. Attempts to show by reasoning that reason is not the right judge of certain problems are as thick as dead leaves on the path of literature; and it is inconceivable that any man who realised this would go about the task afresh in the primeval fashion of Mr. Kidd. He falls into every snare of self-contradiction that the theme admits of, and this with entire unconsciousness that anybody has been there before. A feeling of concern at length overtakes the critical reader at sight of a man who thus, as in a nightmare, swings for ever between the doctrine that the force of progress is

irrational or ultra-rational, and the doctrine that it is to be rationally prescribed. It would seem as if Mr. Kidd had been hypnotised by certain words, so that while "rational" is somehow repellent to him, "scientific" is somehow attractive; and when once he has made out to his own satisfaction that an irrational instinct is the fundamentally elevating element in affairs, he must immediately proceed to affirm that "the deep-seated instincts of society have a truer scientific basis than our current science".\* He does at times catch at "reason", declaring that the million creeds of the world's millions are "the natural and inevitable complement of our reason";† but as a rule he prefers to be "scientific". For other irrationalists, "scientific" is the intolerable term, the symbol of the evil thing. The victim has apparently no choice. Once hypnotised by a particular term, he must dree his weird. The attitude of other men can make no impression on him. He disposes of their deepest convictions by saying that they are not "fundamental instincts" as *his* quasi-convictions are, and in that fool's paradise of phrases he swoons content, himself literally stripped of every fundamental intellectual instinct properly so called.

In this frame of mind, of course, a man sees

\* *Id.* p. 113.

† *Id.* p. 116.

or states all history in terms of his verbal phantasy; and Mr. Kidd manages this the more easily because his knowledge of history is scanty and second-hand. The fashion in which he reduces the vast drama of European history to his purpose in terms of a few off-hand deliverances, misconceived at that, from Mr. Lecky and Mr. Froude and Mr. Mahaffy, is perfectly in keeping with his inexpensive philosophic method. Of the process of history his conception is as disjunct, as divided against itself, as his conception of the nature of belief. In one and the same page‡ he complains that rationalists "overlook the connection between the present and the past"; that by them "the essential unity and continuity of the vital process which has been in progress in our civilisation from the beginning is almost entirely lost sight of"; and again that "in the French nation of the present day we have the extraordinary spectacle of a whole people who *have cut themselves off from the past in the world of thought, almost as completely as they have done in the world of politics*". That is to say, the French have reprehensibly broken the continuity which cannot be broken, doing it both in thought and in action. And only three pages farther on, the process of self-stultification is repeated. On the appropriate

‡ *Id.* p. 120.

basis of a falsism from Mr. Froude, the history of the decline of the Roman Republic is generalised as a "history of death", "*underneath*" which—so Mr. Kidd fitly phrases it—"the observer has, outlined before him, a remarkable spectacle. It is the phenomenon of a gigantic birth. To the scientific mind"—save the mark!—"there can be no mistaking the signs which accompany the *beginning of life*, whether it be the birth of the humblest plant, or of a new solar system". Thus Mr. Kidd swings between the opposite poles of "essential continuity" and "beginning of new life", even as he swings between those of "the scientific" and the "ultra-rational", and as Coleridge swung between those of the defence and the denunciation of the "Will to believe". We are witnessing a process in pathological psychology, so to speak.

If it is possible, when helped by science, to be patient with one who thus forever stumbles over his own garment, it is harder to bear with the tissue of bogus history which Mr. Kidd puts together from the congenially contradictory patchwork of Mr. Lecky. For him a few of the most reckless of that writer's affirmations—affirmations of which the same writer's pages often supply in abundance the disproof—serve as summaries of the relations of Christians to Pagans, and of the significance of Christianity as a historic force ;



and one of the most careless utterances of Lewes on Greek ethics serves him for a generalisation on the Hellenic spirit. Of valid knowledge of the case he has next to none. He makes the ordinary uncomprehending assumption that the rise of Christianity revolutionised thought, feeling, and philosophy—this despite his own doctrine of organic continuity—and he passes in a sentence from the period of decaying Rome to the twelfth century, noting neither the enormous transition from an old to a semi-barbaric civilisation on the one hand, nor the long continuance and final fall of the Eastern Empire on the other. The main doctrine of his book is that the irrational religious instinct secures progress by making the individual subordinate his own good to that of the species; and he represents Christianity as the most effective form of the instinct. Blindly assuming that in Christendom “the people . . . . have successfully assailed the almost impregnable position of the power-holding classes”, he further decides that this has been brought about by “the immense fund of altruistic feeling with which our Western societies have become equipped”, and lays it down that “in the eyes of the evolutionist (!), it is by contributing the factor which has rendered this unique process of social development possible, that the Christian religion has tended to raise the peoples affected by it to

the commanding place they have come to occupy in the world".\* To keep this theory in countenance, the thousand years of Chinese Christianity in Byzantium, the absolute stagnation of Christian Abyssinia, and the collapse of Christian Egypt, Africa, Syria, and Spain before Islam, are sublimely ignored. Mr. Kidd will prove his case if only you let him ignore two-thirds of the leading facts of history, and handle the rest in a fashion which reduces evolutionary science to burlesque.

It is to be expected from all this that when he comes to a concrete problem, such as the decline of slavery, Mr. Kidd will merely adapt the formulas of the Christian Evidence lecturer. The Christian doctrine is that "Christianity abolished slavery": Mr. Kidd puts it that slavery was abolished by "that ethical movement upon which our civilisation is founded". To prove this he assumes with Mr. Lecky and the average Christian that the Gospel doctrine was "a proclamation of the universal brotherhood of man"—this in the face of the overwhelming fact that the Gospel from first to last has been a doctrine of limited salvation on a basis of exclusive creed. Beginning in that style, you can go as far as you please, and you easily arrive at the conclusion that the "two doctrines which contributed most to

\* *Id.* pp. 165-6.

producing the extinction of slavery were the doctrine of salvation and the doctrine of the equality of all men before the Deity—both being essentially ultra-rational".† Mr. Kidd shows that he is aware that slavery has "flourished down almost into our own times under the auspices . . . of an Anglo-Saxon community"; but the knowledge has no effect on his sociology. As little is that affected by the knowledge he has presumably gathered from Mr. Lecky—that in the Christianised Roman Empire, living under the flawlessly irrational creed of salvation, there were probably more slaves than under Paganism, and not more manumissions.

It is needless, therefore, to inquire whether he knows that the first decisive modern blow at slavery was dealt by the French Revolution, at a time when the Christian doctrine of salvation had nearly as little hold on the minds of those actively concerned as it has on the minds of French politicians to-day. In this case, perhaps, Mr. Kidd would withdraw the trump card of "salvation" and play that of "equality of all men before the Deity", making out that the "aggressive" Paine and the devout Robespierre in their different ways were thus after all satisfactorily irrational, though Paine's fellow-Deists in the United States were not irrational enough to take

† *Id.* p. 168.

up his testimony against slavery. And here we come to a problem that would be worth discussing with a more competent thinker than Mr. Kidd.

The one element of plausibility in Mr. Kidd's doctrine, as some readers may have already inferred, is the use he is unconsciously able to make of the old difficulty as to the definition of the moving forces in humanitarian progress; and only his ignorance or disregard of all previous discussion on the subject enables him to write, as he has done, a large book without clearing it up in the slightest degree, but on the contrary with the result of freshly confounding old confusion. He raises the question as to whether humanitarian ideas are or are not "intellectual", and he decides with much simplicity that they are not, evidently supposing that when he uses the term "intellectual" he has laid down a definite proposition. The preliminary dialectic of Comte and Spencer on this head is as far from enlightening him as the more practical performance of Buckle. To work over the problem in detail in this already over-long examination of a laboriously unprofitable book is of course impossible; but it may be useful to offer a statement of a rational theory by way of showing the value of Mr. Kidd's.

It may be safely said that it is equally falla-

cious and superficial to define humanitarian ideas as "intellectual" and to describe them as "ultra-rational". It is a plain fallacy, to begin with, to assume that even a religious belief is primarily irrational or ultra-rational, much as the rationalist may be tempted to make the concession when the religionist demands it. We may thus apply the term "irrational" in a colloquial way; but when we expressly philosophise we must discriminate. Primitive religion is just primitive reasoning, primitive science, primitive philosophy. Irrationalism arises, strictly speaking, only when minds like Mr. Kidd's, met by the demonstration that a given doctrine or notion is a delusion, insist on maintaining it on the score that it is profoundly useful. When a man thus morbidly clings to ancient errors, without believing that they are truths, he is as strictly irrational as it is possible for a sane man to be; but when he merely believes a doctrine to be true on fallacious grounds he is not to be termed an Irrationalist. Most religious men, perhaps, are capable of seeing and abandoning their errors if shown them before they have hardened or weakened into mere prejudice. Again, when we come to deal with such a belief as that in the equality of men before a Deity, or in the "intention" of a Deity that men should be equal, though we are dealing with a fallacious blend of human sym-

pathy and theological logic, we are assuredly not aloof from "intellectual" processes in any sense of the term. Even Mr. Kidd, in affirming the idle because insignificant proposition that the "moving force behind" civilisation "is not the intellect, and that the development as a whole is not in any true sense an intellectual movement," goes on immediately, in his helpless way, to avow that "we may distinguish, with some degree of clearness, the nature of the part taken therein by the intellect".\* "The intellect," he says, "is employed in developing ground which has been won for it by other forces." But beyond this crude and useless discrimination he has no help to offer us, and he proceeds to talk vainly of "that ethical movement which we have regarded as the seat of the vital phenomena we are witnessing"—this shortly after asserting that the "*religious* movement" since the fifteenth century† is the "actual vital centre" of the process of current civilisation.‡ Whence then came the ethical or religious "movement"? From the Christian creed? If so, the doctrines of that being historico-philosophical propositions, the initial impetus was "intellectual".

\* *Id.* p. 146.

‡ Here again, after his insistence on "vital continuity", Mr. Kidd makes the Renaissance "the great watershed which divides the modern world from the old".

† *Id.* p. 128.

Whichever way we turn, whether we take the conventional formulas of Mr. Lecky and Mr. Kidd or look for ourselves into the facts, we find that the "movement" of civilisation is a total of forces into which there enter on the one hand true and false and new and old beliefs as to human and cosmic affairs, and on the other hand states and habits of feeling and conduct determined partly by political and economic conditions and partly by the beliefs aforesaid. Thus the decline of slavery may in one case be a purely or mainly economic phenomenon, as the rise of art may partly be in another; while in yet another case, as in our own century, the restriction of slavery may be led up to alike by strictly economic and political causes and by a manifold development of sympathy through literary culture, political habit, and political, ethical, and religious reasoning. Such, roughly, is the rationalist view of humanitarian and other progress;\* and merely to state it is at least to indicate the refutation of Mr. Kidd's gospel of the blessedness of unreason.

It is needless to argue at any length on Mr. Kidd's applications of his theory of civilisation to present and future affairs. He seeks to make

\* I may be allowed to refer the reader to a popular and incomplete but perhaps not useless treatment of the general question in a paper on 'Emotion in History' in the preceding volume, 'Essays in Ethics'.

good his doctrine of the necessity of an irrational religious motive by just such appeals to the judicial reason as serve—logically or otherwise—to convince the judicial reason that the religious theory of life is a delusion. He appeals to reason to distrust reason. Always his argument resolves itself into the absurdity: "It is reasonable to be unreasonable"; and full in sight of reason does he spread the irrationalist net. In brief, his social diagnosis and prescription would run thus:

*People who carefully apply reason to their way of life, like the ancient Greeks and the modern French, tend to decline in power and to die out. To prevent the application of reason to the problems of life, then, is the course seen by reason to be rational; and in order to succeed in this course we must reasonably maintain an unreasonable religious system. Systematic socialism and systematic individualism are alike ruinously rational, being alike the expression of the wish of the individual to better his lot, which wish always prevents future betterment. We must therefore take thought for the morrow by not taking thought for the morrow, but follow those blind instincts which our other instincts tell us ought not to be followed; and to keep everything on right lines we must believe in a religion which we have no reason for believing.*

On the historical side of this egregious philosophy it may suffice to say that Mr. Kidd has no



more comprehension of the social dynamics of the present state of France than he has of the social dynamics of ancient Greece. He himself affirms in his closing paragraph that "all anticipations and forebodings as to the future of the incoming democracy, founded upon comparisons with the past, are unreliable or worthless"; yet he blindly brackets ancient Greece and modern France as alike illustrating his doctrine of future developments. In regard to France he is dominated, like the general run of critics, both French and English, by the mere primary hallucination of numbers; and, noting a check to the birth-rate without suspecting its economic cause, assumes he is facing a new phenomenon, and asserts decline in the face of the highest level of all-round efficiency that France has ever shown. By implication, he prescribes the reckless procreation and correlative misery of East London as the *conditio sine qua non* of that glory which he associates with English civilisation; and to the confused empiricism of his sociology he adds much of the crude braggadocio of the average Anglo-Saxon. It speaks volumes for the present intellectual condition of average Anglo-Saxondom that such a body of doctrine should be respectfully discussed in the press as "original" and "scientific" and even "profound"; and that its primitive paralogisms should seem to some

readers to make an end of the master principle of modern life—the realised instinct to “seek truth and ensue it”.

Such a reception of such a work means simply this, that many if not most of the educated people who are committed to religious affirmations are conscious of the hollowness of their position, and are anxiously grateful to anyone who seems to supply them with a new argument. In that spirit they acclaimed the quaint sophistries of Mr. Drummond, over which already they have lost heart. Even their adversaries are fain to wish that for the general credit of mankind the failing faith could take its downward course with seemlier steps, and crown its last struggle with the pathos of dignity.

## CULTURE AND PROGRESS.

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### I.—CULTURE AND REACTION.

(1887.)

#### I.

Some years ago a rather brisk breeze of discussion was set up in the political and literary world by a remark which came from the Earl of Carnarvon, to the effect that, whatever might habitually be said to the contrary by politicians of a different way of thinking, three-fourths of the intelligence and literary ability of the country were on the side of that political party to which the noble Earl belonged. I recall this utterance, not with the purpose of discussing it on its merits, but in order to make the confession that perhaps some of us on the "extreme left" did not, in our comments at the time, fully recognise the amount of sociological truth which, politics apart, underlay the Earl's assertion. Our rejoinders, I think, took the shape of more or less derisive denials, supported by more or less detailed evidence going to show that most Conservatives were not very clever, while many Liberals were. Now this might for practical purposes be an adequate kind of answer to Lord Carnarvon, whose farsightedness in respect of his claim I should be loth to

vindicate ; but behind the merely partisan aspect of the matter there is an issue of more lasting importance, leading as it does to one of the central problems of social philosophy.

It is with an eye to this problem that I take up his lordship's thesis ; and indeed it is from this point of view only that it becomes at all impressive ; for in its partisan sense it deserved most of the banter passed upon it. It was, I think, a writer in the *Saturday Review* who lately said that whereas twenty years ago most intelligent men were Liberals, to-day they are mostly Conservatives, Mr. Gladstone being the cause ; but this is too obviously one of those pieces of party philosophy which, as Mr. Arnold observes, cannot possibly impose on anyone outside of party politics. If the *personnel* of the House of Commons is to be looked to for proof of such contentions, they cannot be entertained for a moment ; and it is only in setting party politics aside that they can be seen to have any admixture of truth. Once we get outside the strife of platform and newspaper, however, the case wears a different look. It has to be admitted—and no Liberal need hesitate to make the admission—that in this country not a few men of unchallengeable calibre and culture are found taking up, whether early or late in life, a position more or less unfriendly to what are regarded as the popular social or poli-

tical tendencies of the time—or to one or other of these tendencies.

It is impossible to make an exhaustive catalogue; but, taking the names of a few of the dead with a number of the living, we may make out such a list as this: Mr. Carlyle, Mr. Ruskin, Mr. W. R. Greg, Sir Henry Maine, Professor Tyn-dall, Mr. Arnold, Mr. Goldwin Smith, Mr. Froude, George Eliot, Mr. Herbert Spencer, Lord Tennyson, and—on some counts perhaps—Mr. Swinburne; while we may name in addition such younger literary men as Mr. Traill, Mr. Andrew Lang, and Mr. Saintsbury. Now, instead of simply countering this list with another made up of the names of those who are known to believe confidently in democracy and all its doings, let us simply see what is implied in the drift of such a number of various minds towards the position which we define as reactionary; a term which of course is question-begging, and in that capacity saves exposition.

It will be well, however, to limit as far as may be the ground taken as granted in our inquiry; and to that end I seek to lay stress rather on tendencies than on questions of immediate policy; and, above all, on the careers of the dead rather than on the careers of the living. Only, it is needful to indicate wherein the reactionism of the living is held to consist.

## II.

Carlyle, to begin with, presents us with the spectacle of a man who, setting out in youth with political sympathies of a decidedly forward kind, ended by taking up an attitude scarcely distinguishable from that of an average irascible member of the British aristocracy, stricken with years and infirmities, and furious at the last extension of the suffrage. That this is no exaggeration, but an accurate though perhaps unsympathetic account of the facts, can easily be ascertained by anyone who will for a little set aside the glamor of Carlyle's personality and make a dispassionate study of his mental history. As a youth we find him so strongly in sympathy with the misgoverned common people in Scotland that when a friend suggests that he should join the volunteers who, on the side of the Government, apprehend a civil war, he intimates that he is not sure he should not take the other side.\* In his diary, again, in his early married years, we find the most stringent indictment of a social system in which a careless aristocracy, masters of the soil and of the laws, give their lives to sport and luxury, and let the people stumble on under their burdens as best they can.† So, too, we find him

\* 'Reminiscences,' i, 153.

† Froude's 'Life' (First Forty Years), ii, 83, 87-8.

passionately impeaching the misgovernment of Ireland. Then, in the 'History of the French Revolution', we have a hundred suggestions of alert humanitarian feeling, apart from the mere denunciation of the old régime; as when he falls into a sardonic reverie on the ethics of the trade of the soldier, in whose case the destruction of human life is regarded as a glorious calling because he happens to wear a uniform and has his weapon methodically girded on his thigh.† All this sympathy with rationalism in morals and politics did not disappear in a day. In the 'Latter Day Pamphlets', among much that is obscurantist and reactionary, as the virtual defence of slavery and the outcry against humane management of prisons, we have still denunciations of an unworking aristocracy, devoting its life to the preservation of game, satire on the leaders who seemed to be at the top of things simply by force of levitation; and sarcasm on the futile bureaucracy which spent its time in docketing papers and "having the honor to be". But a change gradually came over the thinker's spirit. It set in, doubtless, when he began to formulate for himself the doctrine that not only are great men great instruments of human progress, but it is the eternally destined lot of mankind in the mass to

† 'History of the French Revolution.' People's ed iii, 41.

be always in subservience to such men. In his young days he instinctively viewed heroes as a kind of person the world could do very well without.\* As he extended his view, and realised what forces great men of all orders had been in human history, he made the blunder natural to a mind which scouted all sociological method and a temper which spurned the social instinct; swinging round from one extreme to the opposite; from a temperamental dislike of one species of platitude to an equally temperamental aversion for another. For the mature Carlyle, human history is a mere background across which pass the salient figures of the men of special faculty—and not even all of these, for his appreciation is limited, and he sees Cæsar and Cromwell and Frederick, with hardly an eye for Aristotle and Pheidias and Michel Angelo. He is become a prophet of physical force and self-assertion.

Nay, he is prejudiced and just a trifle snobbish in his own sphere, paying a singular adoration to final success as distinguished from capacity; caring little for the masterly Hannibal, and having small sympathy to give to a forceful Marlowe who dies in his flower. And while we can see clearly enough that there is a moral element

\* ‘*Essay on Burns*,’ People’s ed. p. 6.



which asserts itself, however capriciously, in his choice of favorites, there is yet no security that the caprice will not in any one case be extravagant. He would perhaps never dream of doing for Marlborough, ablest of all English soldiers, what he did for Cromwell; but see how he juggles over the iniquities of some of the men he happens to be drawn to; and how Frederick, in spite of all mendacities and pettinesses, must needs come out great because he was a strong king. In the lecture on Napoleon there is a vindication of the Emperor's veracity of character which only proves how fantastically foolish a great writer can be. How leniently, again, does the historian and essayist handle the vices of Mirabeau, whom he likes; and how ruthlessly does he point the finger at Marat, whom he does not like.† Let us remember to his credit that when there was transacted before his own eyes the crime of Napoleon III, the righteous spirit in the man broke out in words of wrath at the wickedness, with words of just contempt for the criminal;‡ but let me confess I can feel no security that if that crime had been only a hundred years off, the successful plotter would not

† Compare, in the 'French Revolution', the passages on the two men's deaths, ii, 124; iii, 144.

‡ Froude's 'Life' (London period), i, 152. Compare Mr. Moncure Conway's article in *Harper's Magazine*, May, 1881, p. 907.

have figured for Carlyle as a capable ruler of men, a trifle unscrupulous perhaps, but still laudable as possessing the one thing needful, the power to put his foot down. For certainly Carlyle systematically eulogised men who were not appreciably better than the third Napoleon; and his devotion of his last working years to an apotheosis of Frederick, whatever may be the brilliance of the artistic result and the real value of the facts compiled, remains a proof of the final and fundamental perversion of his judgment as a critic of life.

All this, then, can be seen to be an aberration of sentiment, traceable to a simple incapacity for self-analysis and a lack of patience with human evolution. The young Carlyle, glaring on the world of convention and dulness around him, ceases by degrees even to desire that the mass should ever be levelled up. He becomes bitterly impatient of all claim that they should in any way govern themselves. To his mind, further fanaticised by an arbitrary theosophy, their place in the order of things is to *be* ruled, apart altogether from any choice of theirs. All talk of political reform or government by the will of the people become to him an intolerable presumption; and as he alienates himself more and more from sympathy with common aspiration he begins to look very leniently on what he had once frowned at.

At the funeral of the Duke of Wellington we can still find him resenting the sight that catches his eye, of a dignitary being driven along in one of the Queen's carriages as a mourner and all the while tranquilly reading a newspaper.\* But in the last years of all Carlyle is reconciled to the aristocracy. They have not yet learned to work, but he has forgiven them that. They still assiduously preserve game, but that proclivity no longer irritates him; and he actually puts it on record that with their charm of manner, their cheerful stoicism and perfection of politeness, they seem to him "the best of English classes";† as if aristocracies at all times and places had not had the same kind of merit—a merit which in itself is simply the final proof of their immense advantages. Carlyle had long ceased by this time to care for any forward movement of the day; and he expresses to Sir Garnet Wolseley in his old age a hope that it may fall to that General's lot to suppress the House of Commons.‡ The Disestablishment of the Irish Church, an act which few Conservatives of any school would now care to undo, was for him a mere unscrupulous device of anarchic faction;§ and though he

\* Froude's 'Life' (London period), ii, 126.

† 'Reminiscences,' ii, 190.

‡ London 'Life', ii, 446.

§ *Id.* ii, 365.

learned before he died to regret some of the things he said in regard to the American civil war,\* the old tree could not change its bent.

No other case, perhaps, is so vivid or so instructive; and it is not to be supposed that the other personages in our list will be found to exhibit the same kind of development; but one or two tendencies of temperament will be seen to explain the various phases of reaction they present. Thus the ordinary primitive passion for war determines in large measure the attitude alike of Professor Tyndall, Lord Tennyson, Mr. Arnold, and Mr. Swinburne, in matters of general politics. It was on the occasion of the victory of Tel-el-Kebir, an inglorious triumph won where a responsible Minister has since admitted we had no right of battle, that Dr. Tyndall, writing from the inspiring environment of the Alps, devoutly repeated the cry of Burke, "Thank God, we are a people yet!"† Mr. Arnold, again, thinks it makes for righteousness to sneer at the Peace Society, and at the withdrawal from the Transvaal war after the defeat of Majuba Hill; while the Poet Laureate, Mr. George Meredith, and Mr. Swinburne, have of late been equally doing their best to foster the Chauvinist bent of their country-

\* *Id.* ii, 247, *note*; Mr. Conway's art. p. 909.

† See his letter in the *Times*, Sept. 22, 1882.

men, never very profoundly modified by the instincts of economy which these gentlemen so severely reprobate. A quasi-poem given to the world by the novelist "Ouida" some years ago was a further testimony to the strength of the primeval instincts in literary minds. There is no discoverable differentiation between the bellicose passion as these display it, and its manifestations in the case of the general populace. "Ouida's" muse has no more recondite inspiration than the concept of "Rule Britannia"; Lord Tennyson and Mr. Swinburne feel about the British navy as do all British boys at school, conjuring with the names of Blake and Nelson and objugating the French,‡ as did their forefathers in after-dinner speeches begotten of port-wine; and the younger and erewhile democratic poet's contribution to the ethical discussion raised by recent wars of aggression is an addition to the outcry over Gordon, whose life's work consisted in selling his sword to one tyrannous power after another for the subjugation of their rebels. Mr. Meredith is unquestionably a subtle and original novelist; but the generic principle of "our side for ever" serves him sufficiently for poetic mo-

‡ Compare the Laureate's 'Third of February, 1852,' and Mr. Swinburne's 'Word for the Nation', in the volume 'A Midsummer's Holiday'; and see also the latter's prefatory verses to a recent volume by Mrs. Davenport Adams.

tive when he turns his thoughts to the relations of the European powers.

One calls this outcrop of the war spirit reactionary, inasmuch as it obviously tends to make all political thinking revert to a lower stage than that it has reached among the better minds; and one sees that the explanation is at bottom physiological—that these passions are really physical survivals. Hardly less materialistic, however, is the explanation of reactionism of that more comprehensive kind in which men turn, like Carlyle, against the general movement of political thought for lack of sympathy with ordinary aspiration. It is the same nervous impatience of the methods of actual progress that makes Mr. Ruskin ever and again break out in random invective, finding relief for his pent-up feelings in explosions to the effect that he and Carlyle alone in these days have stood for “God and the Queen”. That is the genuine note of reaction; the resentment of the man who would have his fellows go in a particular way, and who, when they do otherwise, not merely grows bitter over their perversity, but throws himself into any camp from which he can assail them.

More orderly, and therefore more weighty, is the reaction of a mind like Sir Henry Maine’s; but here again I venture to impute a strictly instinctive or sub-rational impulse, a temperamental

repugnance to the faults and crudities of democratic thinking, leading to a rejection of all democratic opinion, and an assumption of the contrary attitude without a corresponding scrutiny. If Sir Henry's attitude in politics were strictly an expression of reasoned judgment, he could not rest content with merely exposing the evils of democratism: he would go on to contrast with them the evils of monarchic systems and try to strike a balance. This he never does; and our verdict must be that he is swayed by a primary antipathy which he has not submitted to intellectual tests, intelligent as is the form of its utterance. In Mr. Froude's case, of course, the fact is much more apparent. That gifted writer, loosely girt with the mantle of Carlyle, seems to have now become permanently incapable of arranging his prejudices and predilections in any consistent scheme whatever; and his ejaculations on current history in his latest work do but prove that he feels sore about certain developments of thought which he cannot confute or even properly analyse.\*

### III.

When we come to such names as those of George Eliot and Herbert Spencer, it behoves us to discriminate our grounds; the tendencies of

\* See '*Oceana*', small ed., pp. 10, 25, 337.

such writers, and the manner of their relation to life, being so distinctly different. But in each, I think, we may detect so much manifestation of the spirit of reaction in one form or another as will usefully illustrate the problem about the sources and laws of that influence in general. Of George Eliot we say with all possible respect that while her total influence could not but be beneficent at all times, there is to be detected in her own mental life a certain narrowing and shrinking of opinion, a change of temper bearing alike on her political, religious, and social attitude. On almost all lines of thought she learned to take, at times if not always, the stationary as against the progressive attitude, setting her face against absolute straightforwardness in matters of religion; † giving her sympathy to the purely fanatical movement of Jewish nationalism after having seen in her youth its worse aspects; ‡ coming to approve of the politics of Lord Beaconsfield because she was sensible of the weaknesses of Mr. Gladstone; § deprecating the attempt to educate servants, ¶ and so on—positions all dis-

† See the 'Life', ii, 6, 64, 343.

‡ *Id.* i, 171-3.

§ See Lord Acton's article on "George Eliot's Life", *Nineteenth Century*, March, 1885, p. 475. Compare the 'Life', iii, 199.

¶ In an article contributed by her to the *Pall Mall Gazette* during her life, and reprinted there since her death.



cernible as phases of a growing dislike to moving on, and of a desire to cultivate old-standing associations for their own sake.

Again the factors are traceable to the province of physiology. And such, I suspect, is likewise the case even in regard to the sociological teaching of Mr. Spencer. There is no occasion here to seek to prove any of his distinctive views right or wrong: we have simply to recognise, without begging the question, in the first place a remarkable apparent difference in the tone of some of his earlier and some of his later reasonings—as, his early views on property in land and his later attitude towards pauperism, the former opinion having entirely disappeared from his politics—and, secondly, the very pronounced conflict between his formulated principles of social action and the whole drift of modern legislation. For the moment I propose to take this simply as a datum, implying no further comment than this, that his political criticism, like Sir Henry Maine's, takes account of one set of evils only, and is thus, to say the least, not rigorously scientific. Finally, instead of discussing singly the other writers before-mentioned, I would cite, as typical, an utterance in which Mr. Andrew Lang has betrayed as his ground for hostility to democratism the very natural objection of a man of wit and culture to declamatory platitude; this objection, as in the

previous cases, being acted on without any reference to the most obvious counter-considerations. Mr. Lang has recently stigmatised M. Renan's later moral teachings in severe terms, as those of an elderly butterfly; and he takes occasion in the course of his strictures to condemn that author by implication for having taken away from many people their religious faith;\* but when in another portion of his writings he chances to allude to the political faith of a somewhat large section of the human race, he delivers himself to the effect that "democratic ecstasies are a tissue of historical errors and self-complacent content with the commonplace";† a proposition which betrays small desire to encourage men to be happy in their delusions, whatever may be its historical truth.

#### IV.

Instead, now, of raising a discussion on the lines of contemporary politics, which is so rarely a fruitful course, let us go back some distance in our own history, by way of tracing the relations between culture and action at a time sufficiently far removed to permit of our judging without prejudice and coming to conclusions without heat. Again, of course, we must be content to

\* *Fortnightly Review*, January, 1887.

† Preface to *Parchment Library* ed. of Poe's Poems.

take a few typical names. And perhaps we shall find no more permanently interesting one than the first I shall take from bygone history—that of Sir Thomas More. Here we have a man producing in his prime a work which for insight and originality stands alone in its period, and which went so far in advance of ordinary political thought that the reader of to-day finds it more modern in tone and drift than almost anything in English political literature since. Here the Socialist will find his abstract principles anticipated in essential points; and the practical reformer will be startled by a number of wise suggestions which the world has not yet, after these three hundred and seventy years, learnt to act upon.

Yet this very writer, so advanced in his theories that his contemporaries did not even think of resenting them, became in later life a bigot of the bigots, a superstitious fanatic, and a persecutor. In the 'Utopia' we find a theory of religious universalism‡ so broad that only in our own time are men able to take it all seriously. And yet when, later in his life, it is proposed to reform the corrupt Church existing in his day in England, see how More meets the innovators. It being pointed out that the clergy hold half the en-

‡ Morley's ed. ('Ideal Commonwealths', pp. 148-162.

tire revenues of the country, he hotly appeals to the crudest superstition by picturing the terror of the souls in purgatory at the cessation of masses for their repose. Heretics he assails as rebels who aim at massacring the clergy. His style in theological controversy is described by the elder Disraeli, who panegyrises him, as filled with ludicrous ribaldry; the historian Oldmixon sees in it with astonishment the language of a monk.\*

The truth is, More had grown sincerely and extravagantly superstitious: he believed in the napkin which gave the image of Jesus' face, and in a portrait of the Virgin painted by St. Luke: in his daily life he latterly practised penance, wore a hair shirt, and scourged himself with a knotted cord. From this the transition is easy to persecution; and when a heretic is convicted of holding the damnable doctrine that there are no rewards or punishments before the judgment day, More rejoices that he is "burned as there was never wretch I ween better worth".† "A strange and mysterious change," Isaac Disraeli terms this transformation. Hallam, less ready to admit mysteries in anything, observes shrewdly enough that "such changes . . . are very common, as we may have abundantly observed, in all

\* See Disraeli's essay, 'The Psychological Character of Sir Thomas More,' in the 'Amenities of Literature'.

† 'Works,' ed. 1557, fol. 348, cited by Disraeli.

seasons of revolutionary commotions. Men provoke these, sometimes in the gaiety of their hearts, with little design, sometimes with more deliberate intention, but without calculation of the entire consequences, or of their own courage to encounter them. And when such men, like More, are of very quick parts, they are often found to be not over retentive of their opinions, and have little difficulty in abandoning any speculative notion, especially when, like those in the 'Utopia', it can never have had the least influence on their behavior."‡

But this is after all only a general statement of the fact; hardly an explanation of it; and when Hallam goes on to say that the 'Utopia' is "ingenious rather than profound", while his judgment is indeed in a sense true, he is virtually evading the difficulty. It is not by virtue of "profundity" that ordinary men stick to their opinions; and "ingenious" is hardly the word for a book which transcends nearly all the fixed ideas of its time, and surprises us when we come to it to-day by the lucidity with which it formulates for us ideas we had thought to be new.\* Disraeli

‡ 'Introduction to the Literature of Europe,' Pt. I, ch. iv, § 35.

\* In his first edition (§ 34) Hallam laid it down that "the Republic of Plato no doubt furnished More with the germ of his perfect society": in 1847 he added the candid

better appreciated the case when he called it mysterious. For whatever laws we may find for the facts of human degeneration, for the ebb as well as for the flow of good in life, we shall never divest these laws themselves of their share in the elusive mystery of that infinite whole in which they are but faint traceries of outward order. And while the shrewd common-sense observer of men may be content to dispose of certain forms of intellectual tragedy by simply saying that such backslidings are common, for others of us there must remain, in every spectacle of the relapse of gifted minds from great things to small, a profound sense of pathos. It was a poet's feeling of this that made Schiller exhort his fellows to reverence the dreams of their youth; and no complacent formula will screen the failure or drape the bareness of those lives in which the dreams of young aspiration are neither revered nor regretted; in which the high imagining is not so much discarded as simply lost, fading into the light of common day, as the untransformed man grows well pleased to recite the shibboleths of the market-place, salute the idols of the multitude, and cast his crown of hope under the ignoble feet of the palsied lords of life,

note: "Perhaps this is at least doubtful; neither the Republic nor the Laws of Plato bear any resemblance to the Utopia".

whose names are Custom and Cowardice, Sloth, Ignorance, and credulous Fear.

Some practical explanation we must seek, however, for such a relapse as that of Sir Thomas More; and if we are to inquire rightly we must look at the matter psychologically. That is, we must regard the man as an organism endowed with certain gifts and tendencies, certain mental inclinations inherited from the past, which must modify or develop according to their strength and according to the circumstances; such development or modification constituting the upshot of his life. Roughly, that is the formula of all our lives; and true biography would simply be a process of filling it out in detail. Now in More's case we have to reckon with two conflicting elements; an originally strong faculty of criticism of life; and a still stronger tendency, as it in the end turned out, to crystallisation of thought in the face of practical opposition to his action. It is difficult to express how much of our resistance to fresh currents of ideas is a mere matter of physiological recoil from changing our habit of mind. The truth is that when once a particular way of viewing things has become habitual to us, any contention that clashes with it is apt to anger us irrespective of any process of logical examination on our part. In two cases out of three, men do not oppose opinions because they perceive them

to be unsound ; but proceed to prove to themselves that the opinions are unsound because they find themselves opposed to them. Now, this may seem a primitive explanation to offer of the crystallisation of a mind like More's ; but it is really the only one we can rest upon. When we thus find a man in the freshness of his prime looking into life with eyes that pierce below prejudice, and in his later years losing all that insight, and utterly failing to see round his own case as he had formerly seen round the general case ; what can we say but that he has undergone a cerebral change for the worse ; that one part of his nature has lost its vigor, just as his limbs have, and that certain hereditary characteristics, formerly overshadowed by the promising intellectual growth, have asserted their vitality and constituted finally the main part of his nature ?

It has been truly said that there is in most men a poet, whom the man survives. But poetry is only one artistic manifestation of the something there is in the expanding organism, the element of betterment and creation that tends to make change and progress all over the field of life ; and the death of the poet before the man is simply one phase of the succumbing of the new forces to the old—one form of the failure of organic life to effect variation in the face of the influence of an established environment. It is indeed an ap-



parent paradox that a mind like More's, which once saw so much further than those of ordinary men, should in the long run be as-it-were unable to see nearly as far; that the man who analysed society to the extent of projecting the 'Utopia' should finally be unable to adapt himself to a mere political readjustment of the church, and should be furious at a few variations in opinion. Certainly he latterly lacked profundity, in the sense that when the push of conflict came he could not see into life at all; but it was not, I repeat, that the 'Utopia' itself was not a work of deep insight, but that another element in the man, the element of hereditary faith and constitutional tenacity, finally dwarfed and crushed the rarer faculty. The speculative intelligence and the predilection of More never inter-penetrated each other; the one waxed; the other waned. But that it did wane can be seen, I think, to be strictly the result of its very rarity. Successful social variation, it is obvious, must in the terms of the case be a very gradual process; inasmuch as the mass cannot change otherwise than slowly. It is thus the limited and comparatively short-sighted aspirations of the more ordinary minds that realise themselves, rather than the broad perceptions of the farseeing. Now, it is the peculiar snare of the embittered man of culture that as his own aspirations are Utopias, and as he

sees with fatal clearness the nakedness and poverty of the aspirations which prevail among the multitude, he tends to stand aloof from progress altogether: he, like them, tending instinctively to resist mere interference with his use and wont, and he being further inaccessible to arguments which can break down ordinary conservatism, just because his mental range is so much the greater. The most incurable reactionist is he who has himself once had light enough to be above the illumination that serves to guide ordinary minds.

And here is to be noted in especial the reaction that comes of such men seeing how shortsighted often are many of those who get credit for leading the movement of change. Any impartial student of the career of Mr. Gladstone, for instance, must have seen that that statesman's political life has consisted of a series of steps of which he had not foreseen the possibility a short while before taking them. The taunts of his opponents on this head are unanswerable—save, indeed, by the retort that they have in the main shown even less foresight than he. It is the fact that a year or two before disestablishing the Irish Church he pronounced such a measure to be outside the range of practical politics; that he put Mr. Parnell in gaol, amid the plaudits of his party and his countrymen in general, on pretexts no

better than those he now scouts ; that he had no notion either of effectively evading or of preparing-for Home Rule till he could not help himself. All along he has been concerned in getting into wars which he has afterwards seen to be indefensible.

Now, this kind of intelligence has undoubtedly, as is remarked with hardly perceptible irony by Mr. Spencer,\* the merit of being in harmony with that of the general public ; but it has at the same time the drawback of being inferior in consistency and prescience to that of many men of ability ; and it is not astonishing, accordingly, if these men refuse to call such a one leader, whether in thought or in action. It is small wonder if Professor Huxley, studying on the one hand the hand-to-mouth character of Mr. Gladstone's political philosophy, and on the other hand his inveterate incapacity in other fields of controversy which he persists in entering, should be minded to turn his back on Gladstonism all round. But all the same, Professor Huxley is on his way to being a reactionist of a commonplace kind, if for such reasons he enters the opposite camp of sciolists—a fate from which, however, he appears to be preserved by bringing his scientific habits of observation to bear on Lord Randolph Churchill.

\* 'The Study of Sociology,' ed. 1873, p. 395.

## V.

Lest our general account of the matter should not be sufficiently clear in the light of the single instance of Sir Thomas More, let us consider those of two other great men of a later time—David Hume and Edmund Burke. Here we have two more very memorable minds whose political development was from an attitude of clear-sighted sympathy with progress to one of blind and bitter resistance. The facts as to Hume are sufficiently well known; though the permanent importance of his contribution to pure philosophy has tended to centre attention on him in respect of that alone, with the result of dismissing the details of his relation to actual life, as being of merely personal significance. I do not see, however, that philosophy can afford to ignore the personalities of philosophers. They are part of her subject matter, and, some of us think, very far from being the least instructive part; and when we have assimilated Hume's analysis of mind in general we have still to seek the key to the minor problem of the phases of the mind of David Hume.

What concerns us here and now is its transformation on the side of sociology. Everyone remembers how, revising in his old age his 'History of England', he wrote to a friend, with satisfaction, of how he had expunged many "villainous,

sedition Whig touches,"\* penned in those earlier days when he had some sympathy with the cause of the people.† A less dubious notion of the nature of his mental change may be had from a comparison of the text of his essay on 'The Liberty of the Press', as it now stands, with that of the first edition; the first form being found to state the case from the point of view of a man with temperate but strong democratic sympathies; while in the revised edition there is cut out an entire passage in which lies the gist of the original plea for freedom.‡ There are many such changes in his works; changes which give the plainest proof that early principles, rationally arrived at, were abandoned by the elderly man under the stress of a growing personal re-

\* Huxley's 'Hume', p. 41. "I wish," adds the historian, "that my indignation at the present madness, encouraged by lies, calumnies, imposture, and every infamous act usual among popular leaders, may not throw me into the opposite extreme." "A wise wish, indeed," remarks Professor Huxley. "Posterity respectfully concurs therein; and subjects Hume's estimate of England and things English to such modifications as it would probably have undergone had the wish been fulfilled."

† For specimens of the alterations in the history, see Hill Burton's 'Life of Hume', ii, 74-77.

‡ The excision seems to have been first made in the 4-vol. edition of 1770. The 2-vol. ed. of 1764 contains the essay as it originally appeared. It was after 1770 that the present closing sentence was added, in which the liberty of the press is pronounced to be "one of the evils attending mixed forms of government".

pugnance to the manifestations of the spirit of democracy in the England of his own day.

We can trace the repugnance, and the conditions of it, easily enough. When Hume receives the first instalment of Gibbon's History, he writes to express his astonishment at the production of such a masterly work by an Englishman of that day, he having been long accustomed to regard the English people as wholly given up to senseless faction. § Now, a certain amount of this feeling might be due to the national temper in a Scot who, philosopher as he was, could not but be exasperated by the abuse of his own country and people which was so constant a note in the England of that day. Hume indeed confesses that this resentment has frequently made him resolve never in his life to set foot again on English ground.\* But there is clearly the further element of the instinctive contempt and aversion of the sensitive man of culture for the foolish and factious elements in public politics; and this in his later years he expresses in a sufficiently startling manner.

"Oh!" he writes, "how I long to see America and the East Indies revolted, totally and finally—the revenue reduced to half—public credit fully discredited

§ See the letter in Gibbon's *Memoirs*, 'Miscellaneous Works,' ed. 1837, p. 94.

\* Huxley's 'Hume', p. 40.

by bankruptcy—the third of London in ruins, and the rascally mob subdued! I think I am not too old to despair of being witness to all these blessings. I am delighted to see the daily and hourly progress of madness and folly and wickedness in England. The consummation of these qualities are the true ingredients for making a fine narrative in history, especially if followed by some signal and ruinous convulsion—as I hope will soon be the case with that pernicious people!”†

To the calm scientific eyes of Dr. Huxley this outbreak seems to be simply amusing. It is indeed an outbreak of bitter humor; but surely there is, all things considered, again a touch of tragedy in this decline of a great philosopher to the temper which could so bitterly jest. Of course he did not feel as he wrote. This was he of whom Adam Smith, so weighty a judge, declared that he was on the whole the best man he had ever known; to whom Mrs. Cockburn the songstress, in a letter in which she stigmatises his philosophy with pious impertinence, declares that “God has stamped his image of benignity so strongly upon thy *heart*, that not all the labors of thy head could efface it”;‡ and whom his friend Colonel Edmondstone declared to be “a man of the best head and heart, and of the most amiable manners”. But it is hardly the less

† *Id.* pp. 40-41.

‡ Quoted by R. Chambers, ‘Traditions of Edinburgh,’ ed. 1869, p. 72.

humiliating that the show of sardonic malice should come of the philosopher's failure to hold his intellectual balance towards the general movement of society around him.

Naturally his revolt against the movement of things in one direction made him conservative in others; and we find the unbeliever at length thus expressing himself in regard to the superstition of the multitude, being as willing to forgive that as he is unwilling to forgive their other deficiencies:—

“It is putting too great a respect on the vulgar, and on their superstitions, to pique one's self on sincerity with regard to them. Did ever one make it a point to speak truth to children or madmen? The Pythian oracle, with the approbation of Xenophon, advised everyone to worship the Gods — *νομῶ πόλεως* [after the local custom]. I wish it were still in my power to be a hypocrite in this particular. The common duties of society usually require it, and the ecclesiastical profession only adds a little more to an innocent dissimulation, or rather simulation, without which it is impossible to pass through the world. Am I a liar because I order my servant to say I am not at home, when I do not desire to see company?”\*

Thus does the temper of reaction invade successively the different departments of a man's intellectual life, till his best gifts are in part perverted to the uses of darkness and retrogression.

\* Letter to Colonel Edmondstone, Burton's 'Life', ii, 188.



It is some little satisfaction to find that on his deathbed—which was so beautifully serene as to make Smith contrast it with his own often shocking experience of “the horrors of the superstitions on such occasions”—he could please himself by playfully suggesting that if he lived a few years longer he might see “the downfall of the prevailing systems of superstitions”, in regard to which he had been “endeavoring to open the eyes of the public”.†

## VI.

If we are not struck by a tragic note in the political alienation of Hume, we at least cannot fail to perceive it in the case of Burke, the great reactionary figure in English history in modern times. Here was not merely, as in More's case, a mind able in its prime to pierce below conventions and discern the real forces of human action, but one capable of bringing wisdom to bear on that action, and lending to the work of the politician the broad perceptions of the thinker; making politics philosophic and making philosophy political; enlarging the view of the man of affairs, and turning to the account of affairs the large and equal scrutiny of the student. And here again, what a transformation! The man

† See Smith's account, *Id.* 509-515.

who taught wise principles of political progress to one generation, gaining the esteem of the forward-looking and the lovers of truth, was he who earned the eager applause of all the backward minds of the next generation by his desperate onslaught on all forward principles whatever.

We can see perfectly well how the change came about. So long as the balance of things seemed overwhelmingly in favor of political stability, Burke, his own historic and ideal associations being undisturbed, could press reform and innovation on other men. They had, indeed, the same kind of hostility to these changes that he came to have later towards all reforms; but Burke could reason temperately and well when it was other people's prejudices that were ruffled, and not his own. Hence a body of wise political precept, laid down as occasion arose, fitted to guide Englishmen on lines of considerate progress as they had never been guided before. But when the French Revolution came, all was changed. Once the new forces began to move faster than Burke did, his sensibilities were up in arms. Not only did the new haste begin to be odious, but the old abuses began to be tolerable to him; and sympathy for popular wrongs vanished before sympathy with a perturbed aristocracy, and reluctance to interfere roughly with ancient usages.

We can see very well to-day how much basis of true instinct there was in Burke's hostility to the Revolution; how he divined the practical incapacity of so many of the men who drew up paper schemes for the reconstruction of society; and how he was right in his apprehension that this unpracticality would lead to disaster upon disaster. But all the same, the fact remains that he on his side was driven into a blind bigotry which was as profoundly unpractical as any of the follies of the Revolutionists. And this prejudice, it must be remembered, took arms long before there was any real justification in all-round revolutionary excess. The 'Reflections on the French Revolution', as Cobden points out, were given to the world in 1790, when the Constituent Assembly had been sitting for only one year, and when its labors had been "directed to the effecting of reforms compatible with the preservation of a limited monarchy", Lafayette and Necker taking a leading part in the work.\* If the French reformers lost their heads, Burke as certainly lost his; his hostility to their methods culminating in a frantic rage against all who had the least sympathy with their cause; and his aversion to

\* 'Cobden's Political Writings,' Cobden Club ed. p. 287. Mr. Morley too notes that "the year 1790 was precisely the time when the hopes of the best men in France shone most brightly, and seemed most reasonable". 'Burke,' in 'Men of Letters' series, p. 154.

sweeping changes ending in making him champion the grossest injustices and resist angrily the most reasonable attempts at reform.

Here was the case of Sir Thomas More over again with a difference, the lesson being again a psychological one. That transformation of Burke proves that a wise man is capable of unconsciously letting grow up in him a network of nervous associations with a body of customs and institutions, just as it might be with a well-loved human being; the constant association of ideas and contemplations making a tie closely woven of the invisible stuff of feeling, till one day, without adequate warning, there comes on all the links of habit a wrench which strikes like so many knives to the heart, and the erewhile philosopher becomes a mere flame of lacerated nerves and outraged prejudices, fulminating against his tormentors as madly as the man of mere prejudice who never had any philosophy at all—finding, like him, his wrath first and his reasons afterwards.†

† Buckle (3-vol. ed. iii, 467) concludes that Burke's brain was actually diseased; and, as usual, gives good reasons for his opinion. Mr. Morley (p. 2) puts it that "oddly enough" Buckle will have it that Burke, whom he so highly eulogises, "was actually out of his mind when he composed the pieces for which he has been most widely admired and revered". Buckle did not use the sweeping phrase employed by Mr. Morley; and it would have been worth the latter's while to deal with the evi-

Strong feeling, amounting to passion, then, is seen in the cases before us to be the great factor of reaction; and it is indeed a truism to say that the movements which carry men into conflict with the general advance are emotional; seeing that strong emotion is bound up with all strong conviction. But the truth arrived at is that men are repelled into reaction in the first place by a shock to their emotional habits, as it were—by a virtual blow to the affections, analogous to that suffered when in mature life we leave an old home or a familiar circle and enter a new one—not by their mere inability to give intellectual assent to an intellectual proposition. Here asserts itself the truth conveyed in that paradoxical saying of the young Bentham—a doctrine which is so memorable as coming from such a source—that “in the involuntary errors of the *understanding* there can be little to excite, or at least to justify, resentment. That which alone, in a manner, calls for rigid censure, is the sinister bias of the *affec-*

dence. Burke’s mental disturbance was hinted at in his presence in Parliament in 1789; and Buckle (pp. 468-475) traces a crescendo of violence in his utterances. Mental disease is not a matter of being ‘imply either “out of” one’s mind or “in” it. The study of mind as a phase of body cannot be too strongly insisted on in the present connection; and Buckle’s references (p. 407) to the evidence concerning the spread of madness in the French Revolution period are well worth the attention of students.

*tions.*"‡ The point as to rigid censure is indeed not very clear, and Bentham's "in a manner" indicates his own doubt; but he is right as to the supremacy of the "affections" in men's resistance to social change.

And this holds equally true whether the affections are violent as in Burke's case, or, as we sometimes find, bland and timorous. There is a kind of reaction which savors of fear rather than of rage; indeed it is doubtful whether this is not the more frequent phenomenon. We have it in Gibbon, in his corpulent maturity; even the intellectual audacity of his youth\* toning itself down

‡ Preface to the 'Fragment on Government' (comments on Blackstone) ed. 1823, p. xxiv.

\* It has to be noted, however, that in the first volume of his 'Decline and Fall', at the beginning of chapter vii, he thus indicated a mixture of the leanings of criticism and compromise: "Of the various forms of government which have prevailed in the world, an hereditary monarchy seems to present the fairest subject for ridicule. Is it possible to relate, without an indignant smile, that on the father's decease the property of a nation, like that of a drove of oxen, descends to his infant son, as yet unknown to mankind and to himself; and that the bravest warriors and the wisest statesmen, relinquishing their natural right to empire" [an anticipation of the political philosophy of Carlyle] "approach the royal cradle with bended knees and protestations of inviolable fidelity? Satire and declamation may paint these obvious topics in the most dazzling colors, but our more serious thoughts will respect a useful prejudice, that establishes a rule of succession independent of the passions of mankind; and we shall cheerfully acquiesce in any expedient which deprives the multitude of the dangerous, and indeed (*sic*) the ideal power of giving themselves a master."

to the discreet temper he had displayed in that solitary amour in which he "sighed as a lover, obeyed as a son".

"I beg leave," he writes in his memoirs, "to subscribe my assent to Mr. Burke's creed on the revolution of France. I admire his eloquence, I approve his politics, I adore his chivalry, and I can almost excuse his reverence for church establishments. I have sometimes thought of writing a dialogue of the dead, in which Lucian, Erasmus, and Voltaire should mutually acknowledge the danger of exposing an old superstition to the contempt of the blind and fanatic multitude."†

It is impossible not to feel that this smiling cowardice of the elderly man in matters of the intellectual life correlated with his habit of body: that the inelasticity of the limbs tends fatally to invade the mind. We have a suggestive contrast in the case of the statesman before alluded to, in whom bodily energy steadfastly supports the adventurous brain; and one cannot but feel further that in such a life as George Eliot's, to say nothing of the physical side of fluctuations of feeling, the physical constituents of courage equate with the moral manifestations. In mature life she could not brave the world as she did in her youth.

## VII.

To sum up, then, we have in the history of a

† *Misc. Works*, p. 114.

few great minds at once a light by which to read history and a lesson for our own conduct. If such error as we have seen could happen to these great men in their degree, it can happen to any of us in ours ; and if our lives are to be guided by experience it is for us to learn from such catastrophes to be on our guard against similar mishaps. Such lives prove to us that culture, so far from being a constant security for liberality of mind, may be the means of making a man incurably narrow, and wholly alienating him from the progressive elements, such as they are, in the life around him.

But while it leaves him narrow in his action, it undoubtedly gives him power for harm. Burke in his latter years, when the storm of his passion had somewhat spent itself, had a remarkable flash of perception that after all he might have been fighting against the stars in their courses and missing the central truth of the whole matter. For this misgiving Mr. Arnold is moved to give him ecstatic praise ; but surely the praise is rather cheaply earned. Nothing could undo the harm Burke had wrought. His achievement stood : the turning back of the hand on the dial ; the influencing of the great body of English intelligence in a direction blindly hostile to all theories of social progress ; the making impossible for another generation a hundred beneficent changes



that, but for his influence, might have been accomplished in his own day. As to this there cannot well now be any dispute; and therefore it is that such bygone instances are so much more profitable for study, so much likelier to yield us general truths, than the variations of opinion among our contemporaries.

In the latter cases, they may be right and we may be wrong: the balance of truth can never be quite accurately ascertained, just because our personal equation is always present; and we cannot tell by mere comparison whether it is we or our opponents who are being duped by prejudice. But when we muse in the solitudes of the past the air clears for us and passion falls away. When we see how Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge, all began by being ardent democrats, and all grew into hard Tories, we do not sum up either that ardent democratism is all right or that Toryism is utterly wrong: we simply say that, from our vantage-ground to-day, it can be seen that progress of a kind was being made which these men unhappily set their faces against; and that the world is better for the changes they sought to hinder. We see, too, that when the life of culture overlaid the early enthusiasm, the culture was a main means of turning their sympathies away from the commonplace aspirations which were destined to be realised. They gave their sym-

pathies, indeed, to the still more commonplace temper of liking things as they are: that was where they were duped. We must, as the French philosopher says, be the dupes of something, and if we insist that we will not be duped by the spirit of innovation, we too often fall into the arms of the spirit of obstruction.

It makes one wince for human nature to read the terms in which a genius like Coleridge could denounce proposals for political improvements which to-day no man of any party would dream of wishing to undo.\* These facts are not to be used as mere weapons against political opponents. Such a use, indeed, they are rightly to be put to; but we shall have failed to profit by our

\* See his furious protests against the Reform Bill of 1832 in the 'Table Talk', under dates Nov. 20, 1831, Feb. 24, 1832, and April 9 and May 10, 1833; and his rage against the proposal to admit Dissenters to Cambridge (*Id.* May 1, 1834). He would at one time protest against English misgovernment of Ireland (*Id.* February 5, 1833); but in another mood he thinks that "the penal code in Ireland, at the beginning of the last century, was justifiable" for the time (*Id.* March 9, 1833). He deliberately argued (*Id.* May 31, 1833), that the national debt was unobjectionable, because the interest circulated throughout the nation. The darkening effect of bias is the more noteworthy in view of the normal perspicacity and freshness of Coleridge's intelligence. National prejudice he carries to the point of comparing Frenchmen to grains of gunpowder, "each by itself smutty and contemptible," but dangerous in the mass (*Id.* July 30, 1831); and he somewhere says he is thankful he cannot pronounce their language.

study if we do not see that the lesson it yields is for ourselves. For any one of us the old problem may arise at any moment. There always lies open to us, in the world of social and political action, a choice between extreme courses. We may join the over-sanguine, the short-sighted, the hot-headed, and waste our strength on barriers that will not break, creating in that way reaction, and partly frustrating those whose aims are more modest; and if we resist that danger we incur the other, of being led to distrust all aspiration because some goes astray. "Let us above all things take heed," says Plato in the 'Phaedo', "of the danger of becoming misologists, which is one of the very worst things that can happen to us. For as there are misanthropists or haters of men, there are also misologists or haters of ideas."†

Those men whose careers we have been considering did to a greater or less extent become such haters of ideas; and we can see that the process is closely analogous to that by which some men become merely misanthropic. But it is more subtle; its stages are less easily detected; and it works far more harm by contagion than mere misanthropy ever can. It is left for the great minds to work the harm on a large scale,

† Jowett's trans., i, 467.

by influencing whole generations ; but everyone of us who lets himself be driven into sheer reaction by disappointment at what he deems aberrations of the general movement of his fellows, is doing something to check progress, and is fostering the temperamental bias of those who resist because they have never had forward sympathies at all.

## II.—CULTURE AND PESSIMISM.

(1888.)

### I.

It would be a very gratuitous compliment to reactionism, and an equally gratuitous slur on the intellectual life, to say that the acquisition of culture can ever be a direct cause of narrowing or ossifying of mind ; or to imply that culture, as it were, needs to be cured by something that in itself stands on a lower plane. When we say that such men as More, Hume, Burke, Coleridge, and Carlyle, found their culture minister to their temper of antipathy to popular methods of advance, we do not for a moment admit that culture, in the sense of ripened thought, was fitly represented by their attitude. And here I am reminded of the pitfall that such a large proportion of arguments fall into at one part or other

of their course—the pitfall of using a very general term in a limited sense when the listener is free to use it in another.

Obviously enough, the cure for the drawbacks of culture is just—culture. When wise men go astray it is surely not their wisdom that misleads them; and to conceive culture as something outside wisdom would be to narrow the term as fatally in thought as the æsthetic Indifferentist narrows the practice. What Polixenes says to Perdita of Nature and Art may be applied with entire precision to our problem here:—

“Nature is made better by no mean  
But nature makes that mean; so, even that art  
Which you say adds to nature, is an art  
That nature makes.”

Parody the poet's wisdom, and you have the truth that, if it should ever seem that culture leads men astray, the very discovery that they have so strayed, and above all the sense of the need and the method of guarding against such straying, are very plainly the very gifts of culture itself.

We must however guard on the one hand against quibbling, as on the other against a careless use of terms; and there is a common-sense account of the matter which leaves nobody in the dark. Most of us must at some time have recognised that every kind of special pursuit has, as it were, its own attendant infirmities. We used to

hear of "perambulator spine" as a penalty attaching to what seemed a valuable gift of civilisation in the matter of babies; and, not to speak of these diseases of special trades which are far too dark a feature in our industrial polity to make a very tolerable analogy, it is well known that certain forms of physical recreation entail certain disorders. So it is, in the mental life, with the close devotion to a particular employment of brain and nerve; the intellectual and moral risks of artists being perhaps the most instantly apparent. Here we have an ascending scale of danger—danger of losing balance or healthy completeness of life—just in proportion as the artist lives more or less thoroughly a life of nerve excitation; the musician probably suffering more strain to temperament than does the painter; and the actor probably more than either. These are simple biological facts; and it is fundamentally a biological fact that we are facing when we recognise, in the life of the man of culture commonly so called, a special risk—or rather a risk that is the more serious in his case precisely because he does not recognise it to be for him a special risk—of getting athwart with the cumbrous social movement, which with its apparently cheap ideals and vulgar impulses is yet *the* movement of humanity, and practically speaking the only kind of movement humanity can make.

It is not that we say culture, in the wide sense, makes him thus err in the sense in which one sort of perambulator injures the baby's bones; but that, living as he may the cultured life, this is a risk he is not at all sure to escape, though he is particularly apt to think, from his point of view, that it is the other people whose vision gets perverted, and that his culture is his safeguard. The musician or the actor, one fancies, has very little difficulty in seeing the temperamental risks he runs; but the man of culture, accustomed to regard himself as standing to the multitude in the relation of a teacher or superior, has infinite opportunities of self-deception. Take the case of Wordsworth when, speaking of the character of a very estimable though illiterate person in his neighbourhood, he expresses a doubt whether, seeing you could have so much goodness and good sense in a man who had never read a line, it was really a matter of very serious importance to teach poor people to read at all. Now, it might have been said *à priori* that the effect of culture would be to make a man rather under-value illiterate excellence than otherwise; and that is indeed one of the dangers of the possession of just a very little culture; but Wordsworth here, while apparently rising above a natural prejudice, was really obeying an impulse to reaction which took its rise in his emotional revulsion—the growth of

his later years—from the schemes of human improvement which were still in the air after the French Revolution, though British Conservatism took such good care that in the air they should remain. The poet was not dispassionately calculating the best method of training the common people to useful life and good conduct: he was really finding an excuse for his growing coldness to forward ideas, and sophisticating with himself under the show of seeking a philosophic elevation of view.

The fitting answer to such glosing as his on the blessing of ignorance is given with all possible force by Carlyle—the Carlyle of the earlier days—when he spoke the fresh feeling of his hopeful heart: “That there should one man die ignorant who had capacity for knowledge, this I call a tragedy, were it to happen more than twenty times in the minute, as by some computations it does”. If Carlyle sounded another note later, let us not forget this. Here we have the voices of culture and culture; and of course it was culture that spoke truth in Carlyle; but we shall gain little by simply summing up that if Wordsworth’s culture had been of a sounder kind he would not have uttered his glosing platitude about the ignorant wise. The end of the whole matter is that the added culture we chiefly want is the profiting fully by the experience of the



past ; the lesson of which, as we have in part seen, is that cultured minds will be ensnared by passion and prejudice just like the uncultured, unless part of their culture is a special watchfulness against such prejudice. And while they would doubtless have been prejudiced in a more commonplace way if they had not the training they had, the point for us to keep in view is that the prejudices of culture take a certain line, which can be traced and explained, and, what is most of all to the point, can be avoided by us in our individual lives, if we will ever and again clear our judgment by turning our scrutiny on the passionless past, and so escaping for the time the storms and illusions of the present.

## II.

If it be necessary thus to point out that culture does not really make prejudice—that prejudice is physiological or instinctive, and that culture, when not fully philosophised, simply gives one's prejudice a special cast—it is perhaps equally necessary to insist, when we come to deal with the phenomenon of cultured pessimism, that it is not culture which creates pessimism to begin with. Taking pessimism for the moment to mean broadly the feeling that, in Voltaire's phrase, life is a bad joke, it is obvious enough that such a sentiment has not had its birth in any

such habit of intellectual life as we in modern times think of in the use of the term "culture". It is indeed traceable in all times and literatures to minds which had done more thinking than the average; but this is after all only to say that it is the serious people who have said the serious things; and the fact remains that in all ages, as to-day, there must have been many minds uncultured in every sense—if we except indeed the culturing influence of sheer sorrow—which felt the world to be "a sad sight", and existence on the whole a worthless thing. And it is perhaps not too much of a begging of the question in regard to modern philosophic pessimism to say that the gist of the modern idea is, in Europe at least, as old as Æschylus, and in India older still.

When the bound Prometheus has told the Chorus of the service he had done to mortals by ransoming them from destruction, the Chorus, bewailing his hard fate, ask him whether he had contrived to do anything more. "Yes," answers Prometheus, "I prevented mortals from foreseeing their doom"; and when the Chorus ask again what the remedy had been, there comes that profoundly pessimistic answer: "I caused blind hopes to dwell in them"; the Chorus joining in the note of melancholy: "Therein thou gavest to mortals a mighty boon". Ingenious metaphysic may carry the analysis into much

greater complexity ; but here we have the central note alike of the Indian philosophy of the vanity of desire and of Schopenhauer's doctrine that the well-to-live is a blind impulse, which it is for an enlightened human race to mortify, and so secure its own extinction. The antiquity of pessimism, however, is probably no more denied than the antiquity of prejudice ; and what we have to consider, under our general problem of culture and action, is the special fashion in which culture lends itself to pessimism, and the bearing of such pessimism on practical life.

We are thus, of course, dispensed from even the pretence of discussing at length those metaphysical developments by which such systems as those of Schopenhauer and Hartmann are differentiated from the simpler pessimism of the past ; but there is, I think, no unwarrantable sciolism involved in saying briefly that these developments of metaphysic are for many of us disposed of by a general conviction, philosophically arrived at, of the unalterable impossibility of explaining the universe by any mere process of metaphysical deduction. Schopenhauer's postulate of the world-will, and Hartmann's doctrine of the unconscious, are from this point of view simply fresh triumphs of sterile subtlety ; the skill embodied in their details availing nothing against

the veto placed by positive thought on their assumptions.

The anti-metaphysical position may be briefly stated thus: that while metaphysic, by analysing thought, may destroy hallucination and so purify knowledge, it is necessarily impotent, in the nature of things, to make knowledge by way of construction. Now, no amount of analysis, logically conducted, will prove the postulate of a world-will or of an infinite unconscious: you must grant the philosophers these trifling assumptions if you are to go any way with them; and some of us think we have sufficiently good reasons for refusing to assume any such thing; being satisfied that these fresh attempts to construct the explanation of an admittedly existent infinite universe—if that admission be made—out of a brain whose total function is one of relativity, must go the way of all other attempts of the sort.

It was clearly enough inevitable that when modern criticism had disintegrated the God idea, there should be a fresh effort to metaphysicise the universe with the God idea transformed into some new hypothesis; and such efforts, we say, have been made with abundant ability by Schopenhauer and Hartmann. But positive thought must stand to their metaphysic, as such, in precisely the same relation as that in which it stood and stands to the metaphysic of previous genera-

tions. We may admit that their systems have that value of intellectual gymnastic which Sir William Hamilton declared to be one of the main values of all philosophy for men; but further than that, on naturalistic lines, we cannot go.

Our inquiry, then, is narrowed to a consideration of the pessimistic philosophy in so far as it takes a positive shape. And if we are to discuss to any practical purpose we shall soon, I think, further narrow it by a summary refusal to discuss on the lines of the famous question, *Is Life worth living?* Here again a little preliminary metaphysic carefully managed may save us a large amount of circular reasoning. And I would say with Herr Vaihinger as quoted in Mr. Sully's book on Pessimism,\* in spite of the weighty demurrer of Mr. Sully himself, that "the question of the worth of the world is related to problems of practical philosophy in the same way as the metaphysical inquiry into the being of the world to theoretic problems", and that the one is as insoluble as the other. I confess I do not follow Mr. Sully when he says that "if we confine ourselves to the region of the relative and get rid of the 'metempirical factor' in each of the problems, they are perfectly soluble". Surely the

\* *Id.* p. 165.

confining ourselves to the region of the relative is the giving up of both problems, as such.

What Mr. Sully does seem to me to show, in his careful and thoughtful work, is that we may with practical profit discuss and settle the question as to what our temper should be in living the life we cannot help living; which is surely a different thing from settling the problem of the worth of life. The soluble question is not, Is Life worth living, but What *is* Life for us, and how should we adjust ourselves towards it, in view of the sum total of our knowledge. At least, soluble or not, that seems about as practical a question to discuss as any other; and Mr. Sully has given us some solid help towards forming a judgment on it. And it is from this point of view that Strauss seems to have been right in idea, though his terms were misleading, when he said that "every true philosophy is necessarily optimistic, as otherwise she hews down the branch on which she herself is sitting"; and that "If the world is bad, the pessimist's thought of it, as a part of it, is bad also, and so the world becomes good".

"This," says Mr. Sully,<sup>†</sup> "reads like solemn trifling", and perhaps it does sound like trifling, with its ring of epigram and quibble; but surely

<sup>†</sup> Work cited, p. 143.

it is at bottom a piece of sound analysis, though over-lightly expressed. If we are to apply the term "solemn trifling" to anything, we should, I think, on Mr. Sully's own showing, be justified in bestowing it on the work of the pessimists themselves; they being a great deal more solemn than Strauss is in that particular passage, and the effect of Mr. Sully's book being to make out that they have done a good deal of trifling. But we may paraphrase Strauss thus: The proposition that the world is bad has significance only through the subsumption of a knowledge of something good. As that is denied, the formula lacks all significance. But, waiving that checkmate, we further say: If the world is essentially and incurably bad, it is impossible to make it good by an action such as the mortifying of the will-to-live, which is like any other action the outcome of motive. If by reason we can attain to taking a wise and undeluded course, then life is not the mere illusion it had been represented to be. Further, if the will-to-live is to be philosophically classed as something which dupes us, there is clearly no reason for putting the will-to-die in a different category; so that the matter is as broad as it is long. This, I fear, does not yet sound solemn enough, but I do not think it is deliberate trifling; and it is, I maintain, a position which may be taken up by minds strongly in sympathy

with the practical drift of pessimism, so far as it is practical. Many of us, I believe, call ourselves pessimists without swearing by any system, and it is this kind of pessimism that we really want to look into.

### III.

Before going further, then, we must settle what we are to mean by the word 'pessimism'; and this is the more easily settled because it is admitted all round that the etymological meanings alike of optimism and pessimism are untenable for practical purposes. The first term came from the Leibnitzian doctrine, satirically popularised by Voltaire in 'Candide', that this is the best of all possible worlds; and "pessimism" is simply a counter term coined to meet the first. Now, no fruitful discussion is possible if the two terms be taken to mean what they etymologically imply. Mr. Sully points out that Schopenhauer is hardly\*to be taken as serious when he argues that this is the worst of all possible worlds, on the score that the least fraction more evil would kill us all off. Hartmann, again, confesses that his own life is happy, and positively effects a kind of reconciliation of optimism and pessimism† by preaching that "the highest duty of man is to

\*Sully, p. 141.



work in harmony with the unconscious mind, to help on the world process by seeking in every way to promote, first of all, the general growth of intelligence, by which men will be the more quickly brought to recognise the futility of willing, and, secondly, the spread of sympathy, by which they will be lifted out of their narrow individual aims to take part in one universal aim, the annihilation of all misery by the total denial of will".\*

The anti-pessimists, on the other hand, are now-a-days certainly not optimists in the sense of asserting that all is for the best; and what Strauss meant when he said that a true philosophy must be optimistic, was that a philosophy, to be called true, must be practical, that is, must relate to and prescribe action within the bounds of the relative. Here, as in so many cases, there is abundant danger of making an endless discussion on a purely verbal issue.

But when we come to the practical issue, the comparison of the so-called optimistic temper with the pessimistic, so-called, we are really brought face to face with the general facts of life, and can settle our terms with some confidence. We then see our way to define optimism as either

\* It will be observed that Hartmann here applies the old paralogism of pantheism to the purposes of his counter-fallacy of the "unconscious".

the going through life, on the one hand, without being much exercised by the evil in it, or, on the other hand, the being able to console oneself with the belief that the evil may soon or ultimately be in the main remedied. These are of course very different states of mind, the one implying a certain deficiency in sensibility, from a sensitive point of view ; the other implying no such deficiency but simply an excess of hopefulness, from the point of view of those who are less hopeful. Pessimism, on the other hand, may be practically defined, for plain people, as the habit of mind in which a large amount of evil is habitually conceived as necessarily involved in the scheme of things, and in which the amount of evil actually being suffered at any moment is sought to be recognised in thought so far as its vastitude will allow.

Now, having defined optimism alternatively as we have done, it would clearly be unwarrantable for us to say or imply that the pessimist is essentially more altruistic, more sympathetic, than any optimist. We can see every day that the most passionate protests against existing evil, and the most strenuous efforts to lessen it, come from those who believe that well-directed effort might speedily banish evil, almost, from life ; and who are wont to talk of a not very distant condition of things in this world in which unhappiness will

bulk very small indeed. It can hardly be denied, on the face of the matter, that this temper must tend in some measure, so far as it is common, to hasten beneficent action, while the pessimistic temper may conceivably lend itself to virtual conservatism and lack of zeal. But this latter drawback, I think, belongs only to the extremer forms of the pessimistic temper; and is more than counterbalanced by the forms of harm resulting from extreme optimism—that is, from the failure to see how serious the evil in life actually is. The man who thinks the world is very well as it is, and he who thinks it is bound always to be extremely bad, tend to find a common ground in the policy of leaving things alone; and thus neutralise each other from the point of view of the clash of systems. If then these two classes were at all equal in numbers, we might cross them out of the equation; and so be left facing the two tendency-groups of practical optimists and practical pessimists: those who are sensible of the evil of the present but extremely sanguine for the future, and those who, while anxious to lessen the evil seen to be in any measure curable, are unable to conceive of a golden age being brought about with any satisfying rapidity. And since these two classes are in the terms of the case alike bent on curing evil, it might seem as if their speculative difference counted for little.

But the important point for us is now seen to be this, that the greater part of the well-to-do world is really optimist in the undesirable sense of never clearly realising in thought the evil endured by the main mass, of being lacking in sensibility and sympathy, and of so failing to do a tithe of what might be done to lessen those material evils which, on any theory, must largely be attributed to human shortsightedness ; and which therefore must be conceived as modifiable when people become more alive to the problems of their destiny. That is, in brief : optimism, in its more common form, has an opiate quality, and has this over a wide area, while pessimism, from our practical point of view, is a quickening of moral consciousness, and has the value of a constant stimulus to circumspection of life. And in this regard it is impossible to overlook the function of pessimism as a corrective to that form of piety which takes the shape of seeing the hand of a good God in all the things that happen to our particular advantage, and putting aside as a divine mystery—when indeed they are looked at or admitted at all—the other ninety-nine hundredths of life, in which other people suffer to no visible good end. As long ago as Aristotle it was noticed that the well-to-do were prone to show respect to the Gods because the Gods had been good to them ; and, as Mr. Morley says in his

emphatic way, "it is hard to imagine a more execrable emotion than the complacent religiosity of the prosperous". There can be little doubt that the survival of the Christian faith is in a large measure due to the fact that it presents to men an ideal figure of a man of sorrows round which, whatever reason may say, feeling tends to twine itself.

There is, of course, pessimism and pessimism, and it is not to be pretended that the expression of unbelief in human progress is substantially a more attractive sentiment than optimism. On the contrary, much of that reactionism which we have already considered takes the pessimistic guise, as when Carlyle sums up the whole tendencies of his time as a progress to those lower regions which figured so largely in his conceptions of things. But I fancy that when all is said we shall find under these fierce and half-despairing outcries against the line of human movement a certain residual element, that appeals to our sympathy, in the basis of pessimistic judgment of life on which they rest. The man might go wrong, and work harm in his miscalculations of the good and evil in the forces around him; but he has that final claim on our kinder feeling that he was keenly alive to much human failure that ought to impress all of us; and that he never was much at his ease in Zion. And while similarly we may

resent and condemn the pernicious impatience and ill-considered asperity with which Mr. Ruskin assails all divergences from his plans for society, we cannot but respond somewhat to that less egoistic vein in him in which we catch as it were the voice of the sorrow of the race over its withered aspirations, its lost opportunities, and its tragically trivial performance. We hear in him at times the authentic note of the pessimism which sums up the past and looks wearily on the prospects of the future ; though the genius of the man gives its stamp to the manner of his observation, and brings into signal relief for us the variety of the causes which lead men to the pessimistic temper. Thus in the book he has entitled 'The Queen of the Air' he suddenly and characteristically breaks from a comment on certain forms of medieval art decoration into a wildly mournful protest over the constant presence of deformity in life.

"In the Psalter of St. Louis itself," he cries, "half of its letters are twisted snakes ; there is scarcely a wreathed ornament employed in Christian dress or architecture which cannot be traced back to the serpent's coil ; and there is scarcely a rare piece of monish decorated writing in the world that is not tainted with some ill-meant vileness of grotesque—nay, the very leaves of the twisted ivy pattern of the fourteenth century can be followed back to wreaths from the foreheads of the bacchanalian Gods. And truly, it seems to me, as I gather in my mind the evidences of insane religion, degraded art, merciless war, sullen toil, de-

testable pleasure, and vain or idle hope, in which the nations of the world have lived since first they could bear record of themselves—it seems to me, I say, as if the race itself were still half-serpent, not extricated yet from its clay; a lacertine breed of bitterness—the glory of it emaciate with cruel hunger and blotted with venomous stain; and the track of it, on the leaf a glittering slime, and in the sand a useless furrow.”

One cannot listen to that passionate wail without feeling that, however ill it may seem to have been motivated at the moment, it is the response of a seeing eye and a hearing ear to a record of evil stupendous as life itself, which ordinary senses fail to read just because of their dulness.

And this element it is, in the subject matter of pessimism, that most steadily resists the solvent effects of such criticism as is applied to the doctrine by Mr. Sully. This too it is, I might add, which is the most wholesome content of the doctrine as regards its bearing on action. For while there is good reason to agree with Mr. Sully that a view of life as not worth living is rightly to be traced to the organic conditions of him who holds it, and while we may decide with him that most of our own pains, on close scrutiny, are found not to be of a kind that permanently darken life, we have still to face the testimony of the whole past, and the further conviction forced on us that an enormous amount of unredeemed evil is borne at any moment by organisms not so happily placed

as we, and not at all likely to go through the process of philosophically analysing their goods and evils. Too much attention has been given to the merely personal side of the question, to discussion of the point whether we—those of us given to discussing intellectual problems—find our pains over-balance our pleasures, or *vice versa*. Surely there is a more respectable side to pessimism than that which simply returns to the personal question an unhappy answer. And surely one of the moral values of pessimism is that in our general sense of the sadness of human experience we feel less acutely our own pains.

When Miss Helen Zimmern's *Life of Schopenhauer* appeared, some years ago, one lady made a special attack on the pessimist character, on the score of a remark of Miss Zimmern's that Schopenhauer had found a certain solace in contemplating the preponderance of unhappiness in human affairs. Now it is easy, holding an attitude of that kind, to become offensively selfish in it, and it is extremely easy to make it seem grossly selfish; but there are other possibilities in the matter. Go back to Marcus Aurelius, and you find just such a temper, just such a sense of the fleetingness of positive happiness and the permanence of the elements of unhappiness in life, being turned to the account of fortitude and serenity. And just such an attitude towards life it



was that made the dying Antoninus Pius, when the centurion of the guard asked him for the watchword for the night, able to give it with such tranquillity: "*Æquanimitas*," "equal-mindedness," a word which summed up the life-philosophy of those steadfast pagans, living their ordered years with no faith in a life to come.

At times, perhaps, it may seem a cold creed ; but that is simply a matter of comparison with the mood in which for the moment we contemplate it. It is a fallacy to suppose that pessimism, in the sense in which we are considering it, means going through life broken-hearted. Pessimism in that sense—the feeling more or less constantly that your life is not worth living, though you shrink from ending it—is obviously enough the simple expression of your physique. Such pessimism, we may say, is the philosophy of an organism ill-fitted to survive ; as the contrary effusive optimism is the philosophy of an organism well-fitted to survive ; high capacity of survival in the struggle for life, it is to be remembered, being apt to imply a fairly comprehensive egoism.

It will not do to say, as Browning makes his pandit say in '*Ferishtah's Fancies*', that those are to be termed insincere who, taking the view that life is mainly bad, yet continue to live ; the complete statement of their case being that the

blind will to live is itself an evil which they cannot get rid of. But from our practical point of view the optimist as represented by Browning, and the pessimist as represented by the Buddhist solitary, are very instructive examples, throwing light on their own philosophy. Organisms like Browning and Victor Hugo, one can see, find their sanguine creed in their own highly vitalised organisms: their faith is a translation from their physique. Constitutions so abounding in all forms of life, in the capacity for vigorous nerve action and brain action, for feeling, sensation, and passion, cannot in the nature of things be themselves long depressed by any study they may make of the pain in the world: their own exuberant energy must assert itself, and it asserts itself in a cheerful or hopeful view of things. Now, as all morals and all positive philosophy are matters of relation, the simple answer to such optimists is that what is perfectly true for them is not true for the majority; and that a commentary on life from the point of view of an abnormal organism, while perfectly sincere in its conception and expression, may be broadly false for the multitude of normal organisms, just because our relation to life is seen with our own eyes and cannot be seen otherwise.

## IV.

We arrive, then, at this generalisation, that what we may call a working pessimism, as distinguished from that substantially constitutional pessimism which reduces the Indian hermit to a slow death in life, is the outcome of a fairly vivid realisation of existent evil by a personality which is not itself pre-eminently capable of self-regarding enjoyment. That is, once more: a working pessimism is a more altruistic, a more practically sympathetic cast of mind than an aggressive optimism, simply because practical sympathy is at bottom a physiological matter, and consists in having a large amount of nerve action to spare for feeling other people's troubles, by reason of our not using it up with inordinate liberality in manufacturing our own joys. If in thus summing up we seem to call a many-sided poet like Browning egoistic, it has to be remembered that the judgment is a biological statement and not a moral aspersion. Browning, it is to be feared, would still call it "goose criticism"; in which case our only consolation would be the negative one of remembering that, as has been lately said, there are some kinds of goose criticism of which optimistic poets are extremely tolerant.

It has been implied, however, that the pessimism of the more normal or more practically social organism is not at all necessarily a pressure

of unhappiness, but may be rather a means of taking the edge off individual sorrows; and when we say this we may seem to lay ourselves open to a cutting retort from the optimists whom we have accused—biologically speaking—of egoism. If we confess that our pessimism turns in a way to our own gain, egoism, it would seem, is pretty equally divided. But let us not deceive ourselves or our critics. If the inuring ourselves to see the world as a scene of constant suffering means a blunting of our capacity to suffer pain on our own account, the price of that nepenthe is none the less many an hour of sad contemplation, many a quiver of vicarious pain. And I would put it to the sanguine souls who rest on the contention that material evil at least may speedily be extinguished, whether in their imaginary reconstruction of the world with the evil left out they have not at times felt the foundations struck out of their scheme by a passing glimpse of a trouble that lies outside its scope, a breath of wordless woe from the world of animal life; a heart-breaking look of infinite patience in the face of a tired horse or a forsaken dog; a suggestion of that blind struggle that goes on apart from man's control in the vast realm of animated nature, a struggle so implacable and so murderous that when we fully realise it the earth seems, in the words of Mrs. Besant, to be "one

vast torture-trough, in which every forest is stained with blood and every sea and river is sobbing with incalculable pain”.

Such perceptions can never be in themselves aught but saddening; and perhaps the truest summing up of the matter would be that pessimism, in the sense in which we have taken it, teaches us to equalise our painful impressions by making them follow a wider range of sympathy, so that when we feel we bring our own sorrows to the sum total we are not so oppressed by them as we should have been had our self-devotion hindered us from realising the general lot. It is thus, then, that in our limited sense pessimism as it were regulates the tides of feeling, and solidifies and strengthens life by making it less a memory of a series of delirious joys and rending griefs, and more a modulation between the major and the minor keys, in which sorrow itself is made to yield a grave melody by a strange fusion of feeling, for which we have none the less right to feel grateful because we cannot quite follow its processes.

To trace how culture thus extracts sustenance from the sum of things will be a further and distinct step in our inquiry; but in the meantime we have to make up our minds, as well as we may, as to how and how far the life of culture promotes pessimism of one or other order, and

how such pessimism affects action. Going back to our starting-point, I think we may say that while culture will give pessimism a particular cast, as it can give prejudice a particular cast, it involves no serious special risk of communication of the more demoralising forms of pessimism: no special risk of unhappiness, and no special risk of moral paralysis. Goethe's formula was that "Thought expands, but lames; action animates, but narrows". Assuming this to be broadly true, and assuming even that our conception of culture does not involve a saving ingredient of action, the life of culture would be at least as happy as the other.

The cultured man is apt to assume that when he has his moments of collapse and frustration, his ennui and disappointments, they are the specific result of the more intellectual character of his life; forgetting that, as actual observation would abundantly show, these very ennui and pangs of impotence are the lot of all or nearly all organisms, down to the lowest. Whereas there is a risk of overlooking the fact that culture may foster prejudice, there is a mistaken tendency to assume that it unduly fosters an injurious pessimism. Culture has no such monopoly. It has been said of the bust of Julius Cæsar as Pontifex Maximus that it shows the Emperor when, having attained all things, he

judges all things, and is weary of all things—a modern expansion of the weightier and terser Latin of the Emperor Severus: *Omnia fui, nihil expedit*—"I have been all things, nothing avails".

It may be answered: supposing that to be true of Cæsar, which is not proved, Cæsar was not merely a man of action: he was a thinker. So be it; let the instance be taken from the life of action which is without culture, and nowhere will man be found exempt from the recoil of jaded functions and palled longings. Severus rose to the purple from the ranks, living to the end a life of stress and action, and there is no uncertainty about his utterance. Again we find bottom on a physiological fact; and here it behoves us to accept with all simplicity the plain lesson that our real happiness or unhappiness—the final upshot, in sensation, of our philosophy of life—depends very largely indeed on what we do with our bodies. If happiness be biologically definable as the sum total of healthy function, clearly the lower functions must be attended to if the higher are to have their best opportunities. Mr. Cotter Morison states the facts somewhat too cheerfully in his book on 'The Service of Man' when he says that the problems of health are practically settled. Such cheerfulness is indeed specially creditable in a man whose own

work has confessedly been curtailed by ill-health;\* but it obviously overstates the case; and even if it did not, the fact remains that deviation from the known wise course in matters of health is still more common than deviation from the known wise course in morals. And no man can tell how far disordered nerves and functions give the lead to the obscurer operations of his brain, which finally present him with his opinions. What Whitman has said of Carlyle—that in all his judgments the stomach had its casting vote—this is a general and not merely a particular truth.

## V.

But there remains one moral consideration in regard to pessimism which must have obtruded itself on many, and which ought not to be overlooked in such an inquiry as this—the question as to how far culture tends to foster that acute phase of pessimism in which a man's unfavorable judgment of life is found taking the shape of a profound unbelief in human aspiration as such, in unselfishness, in true devotion, in social truth. Perhaps we had better not formulate the case in these extreme terms, as it may be doubted whether once in a generation a mind of any im-

\* Mr. Morison died in his prime, soon after this was written.



portance is found attaining such all-embracing unbelief ; but it is unhappily not rare to find just so much of it as makes men cynically tolerant of much ignobleness and wrong.

It may not be unfair to cite as an illustration the case of a man of high culture like Prosper Mérimée, a man himself devoid of all charlatanry, clear-sighted, abundantly able, sagacious, and honorable ; but ready to accept for himself and his country an unworthy dominion, to bow to it and to smile on it, because of lack of moral impulse to strive for better things, and lack of faith in their possibility. It is not pleasant to think of a brain like Mérimée's giving in its adherence to the third Empire, forgiving its crimes and tolerating its impostures ; finding good counsel indeed as well as flattery for Eugénie, but having no energy to give to the great cause that all the while lay under foot. Yet after all, supposing such cynical quietism to be in part a result of a highly intelligised relation to life (and this is the most we can say), not only can we see that a frankly mercenary quietism, a greedy eye to the main chance, is an extremely familiar thing in regions where culture has small influence, but the cultured man has a safeguard the others have not, in that he has to face his consciousness of the criticism his action is sure to incur. Perhaps a moral pessimism like Mérimée's may consciously

dismiss such a thought as not worth harborage ; but again it is certain that the more normal type, the average man with his yearnings and sympathies, will find in his culture a stimulus to such action as will put him in touch with his kind.

And there is one thing more. That temper of qualified pessimism which I have represented as making for altruism, and therefore for good works, can work a further good by giving us a new basis for forbearance with the personalities whose bias we resist and whose action we condemn ; inasmuch as, when all is said, it leaves us committed to judging performance by a standard which is not set at an ideal pitch. Having learned to reckon on frustration and failure, having habituated ourselves to the mood of retrospection, in which we realise "the burden and the weight of all this unintelligible world", we shall be able at times to transcend our strifes and bury our censures, rising to a calmer air from which we can look down on all human error with a large compassion. And the peace which comes of thus being able to pity and forgive is a precious thing, from whatever fountain it flows.

## III.—CULTURE AND ACTION.

A LECTURE.

(1887.)

An invidious quality, it would seem, begins after a time to attach to the word culture, when we hear it habitually used to suggest an element in life which, by implication, is held to be something superior, something which plain people are likely to lack if they do not take particular pains to attain it. It would be a pity that such a revulsion of sentiment should come between us and the very simple but all-important lesson that is conveyed by the root meaning of the word. Culture is simply the tillage or cultivation of our faculties, the bringing them into play, the turning them to better account, the widening of their range, and the enjoyment of all this process of activity and expansion. For the fundamental fact in our lives, from the point of view of the higher self-interest, is that the use of faculty, the reaching forward of the mind in any way to new experience, is an enduring source of satisfaction; and this implies that every kind of effective and non-injurious stimulus to the mind's action means the making of fresh possibilities of functional life.

This is perhaps the final practical answer to what we may call aggressive or positive as dis-

tinguished from negative pessimism ; and it may be convenient at this stage to put the matter to some extent in the shape of a formula. It will be found, I think, that all states of conscious mental depression, all degrees and all phases of the pessimistic feeling that life is hardly worth living, consist of a recoil of the process of attention on ourselves, seemingly balked in our attempt to attend to something beyond. Whereas the fresh attention, the reaching forward, if it had been accomplished, would have meant either placid or pleasurable consciousness, the turning back of the mind upon itself yields only a sense of impotence and emptiness. The spirit asks itself, What is the use of endeavor? What does exertion really accomplish in this world ; and what are the satisfactions we strive for, when we really look closely into them? And if the spirit is given to the quoting of poetry it finds ready to its hand an inexhaustible store of gloomy aphorisms, of which "dust and ashes" is the burden and refrain.

And here there is to be noted the paradoxical and indeed seemingly absurd fact, which we shall have to consider later, that the repetition of these melancholy dicta is not at bottom a truly painful process—that we are not at our saddest when we contemplate life as a whole, and sum it up as a sad business ; but that such tristful sentiments

make a curious relief from the first blind consciousness of disappointment or pain which started us on that line of thought. Now, what is the approximately true explanation? Simply, that after its painful recoil on itself the mind *has* again performed an act of fresh attention; that the sense of mere impotence has passed into an act of observation of life and of intellectual generalisation therefrom—a generalisation of a melancholy kind certainly, but still an active play of mind on its surroundings, and therefore a much less depressing sensation than the falling back of the intelligence on a sense of its own nothingness. The organism, in its blind way, has supplied its own cure.

Of course there is no certainty that the self-righting process will at all times occur. In a certain proportion of cases, it is unhappily only too certain, there is no speedy transition from self-contemplation to the viewing of things outside. The mind remains a mere consciousness of frustrate desire, a weary ache whose only variation is the change from the lassitude of exhaustion or necessary preoccupation to the renewing quiver of suffering when quickened memory becomes one with pain. And it is only too easy to recall the kind of grief that thus clutches hearts in a grasp which seems as if nothing could ever undo it. Let no philosophy

pretend to countervail the agony of a great bereavement. Consolations it may find; occupations it will suggest; but a great blow to the affections can as little be speedily cured as a great physical wound; the duration in the one case being on the scale of the reach of the imagination as compared with the mere process of readjustment of physical particles on the other.

And on that head it may be said in passing that there is grave reason to doubt whether the shock of bereavement was ever seriously mitigated for any human soul by the belief in an after meeting; there being abundant evidence that such a sentiment is not really a direct antidote to pain at all, but simply a particular means of turning thought into fresh channels—the process of solace resorted to independently of such a belief. But, even setting aside the great calamities of life, we have to confess that at times the mind may fail to sustain itself against the cumulative effect of the lesser ones. Here, however, we are on the track of a cure. The failure of the mind in such cases to react from its state of collapse means one of two things: either the physical department is out of gear, in which case the whole is simply a form of illness; or the resources of the mind are for the time exhausted, and in default of sufficient outside stimulus it remains

paralysed—the frequent condition, it may be said, of many a hundred thousand human beings, rich and poor.

Now, in perhaps two cases out of three, the mere physical solution is possibly the true one. It is hardly possible to be too materialistic in these matters. Every one of us must have noticed, a score of times, how a sense of impotence and discouragement, which sat heavy on us when we were physically and mentally fatigued, becomes transmuted into courage and confidence when rest has worked its occult alchemy in all the cells of brain and body. These experiences go far to prove for us that the value of life, so-called, is like the values of every-day economics, liable to endless variations, according to the state of supply and demand. The face of nature changes for us with the muscular action of our hearts, the vivacity of our brains, and the soundness of our nerves; and these vary from day to day, and from hour to hour. Napoleon said, with frank vanity, but probably with entire truth, that he had met very few men equal to himself in what he called “two o’clock in the morning courage”. Anyone who has known the kind of sinking of the heart that can come for a late watcher with the first grey tints of the dawn, will know the kind of fibre required to face danger at such a time with unshaken coolness.

And if our physical courage is a varying quantity, so is the moral or intellectual.

Setting this down, then, as a fact to be constantly acknowledged and reckoned with, we turn to the other factor in the problem—the position in which the mind stands as regards its intellectual resources and opportunities. Here the case stands thus. Up to the point of the limit of its powers the increasing culture of the mind, speaking broadly, constantly widens its means of occupation, so that so long as the physical basis holds good, man has a practically infinite resource against recoil on himself in the unreaped harvest of knowledge on all sides of him. The man whose culture is a constant process is thus at the other extreme from the absolute pessimist of the Buddhist type, whose whole intelligence is at all times concentrated either on itself or on the specific question of its relation to the universe—never seeking new positive knowledge from the outside world, never striving to enlarge its powers, but on the contrary convinced that within itself alone is true knowledge to be found.

Put it then that the formula of absolute pessimism is, Intelligence brooding on itself, and we may go on to say that the sensations of the really joyless pessimist are of the same order with those of the ordinary mind when it falls back on itself



for want of faculty or incitement to range further. And since the great majority are physically capable of such collapse, it follows that what we call culture is the great antidote, ready to all who will learn in time to use it. What it can do for us we can best see when we study the plight of those who lacked it. To take a familiar historic case, the suicidal temper prevailing among the cultured classes in the Stoic period of the declining Roman Empire was manifestly a result not of their culture in itself, but of its total failure to evolve by outward action. Well might Virgil say that happy would he be who could know causes. If but, instead of gazing fixedly on itself for light as to conduct, and making conduct the whole of life, the Stoic mind could have let itself play freely in the sphere of real knowledge, such as it then was, and with a real interest seek to extend that sphere—if it could have sought untiringly for causes in nature instead of idly imagining them; if it could have looked with seeing eyes into the human past and learned to note there even things apart from their causes, the whole intellectual landscape would have been different. But for minds which had exhausted what range of culture presented itself to them, and felt no impulse to fresh adventure, nothing really remained but a state of brooding melancholy, at best gravely tranquil,

at worst pointing to the door of death as the one way of betterment.

And the equation is substantially the same where you have, under conditions of religious emotion, a blind yearning for martyrdom, or, in an unexcited Oriental nature, a tremorless readiness to yield up life. The Chinaman who is willing to give himself up to die as a substitute for a condemned criminal on a small sum being paid to his family—this is, we say, again speaking biologically, and not ignoring the favorable ethical judgment of the case, an organism in which the will and the several functions, bodily and mental, have ceased to crave for further exercise; in which imagination has ceased to rouse or curiosity to goad. So with the willing religious martyr; life ceases to draw him; he has exhausted what kinds of interest lay ready to his hand; and the new emotion which associates a fresh happiness with the act of death carries him away unresisting. Well, there is no need in these days to make a crusade against martyrdom; but it may be well to put plainly the contrast between the gospel of knowledge, which tells men how to find a fruitful joy in an expanding life, and that which, whether for primitive visionaries or for modern devotees, treats life as worthless, and speaks only of joy beyond it.

For this principle of the expansibility of life

is the very birth of culture ; the visible result of the sheer grasp of intelligence on all the material around it, in those modern centuries in which, after the long dream of theology, men turned in simple curiosity to the study of outside realities. As has been repeatedly remarked, the very idea of human progress is mainly modern ; it has little or no part in ancient thought ; and if on the other hand the ancients did have a conception of culture as a process of development of function, yet this conception was necessarily limited by their inability to conceive of a constant expansion of the sphere of knowledge. But to-day that idea promotes action in every sphere of intellectual life ; in experimental science, in invention, in scientific speculation, in psychology, in physics, in the re-examination of history, in archæology, in the analysis of language and mythology—and, lastly, in practical politics and the criticism of society. And it is the abundant fruitfulness and the boundless promise held out by this element in modern thought that makes it so astonishing that a writer of Mr. Froude's intelligence should even in a moment of exceptionally petulant reactionism say such a thing as that science has finally landed men in "blank nothingness".

Science has yet only begun ; in Emerson's words, we are still but at cock-crow and the

morning star ; and yet so deep are the stirrings of curiosity and hope with which it fills the general mind, that we might rather speak of it, as the poet does of lyric love, as "all a wonder and a wild desire" ; as a rousing of the spirit of the world before the advent of an era in which it is to sail 'by unpath'd waters to undream'd-of shores'. Not from any one man's pre-eminent thought, not from any creed, not from any sacrosanct source or oracle has come to men this heritage of ever-widening interest in things, but from the patient and loyal labors of all of humanity that has gone before ; the true salvation of mankind being thus at last found in its own energies, now that it is learning to be faithful to itself, and to treasure its own gifts, so long trodden under foot in the vain ambition to transfigure its dwelling-place by a light that in sad truth "never was on sea or land".

It is easy, however, to lapse into an ill-considered optimism if we look at the matter merely from the general point of view ; and the question of the benefits of culture, like that of the fitness of the optimistic or pessimistic temper, must finally be pronounced upon from the point of view of the individual organism—one of the scientific units in all methodical study of sociology. Here, at the first blush, the testimony is almost too abundant—on the whole certainly

much more abundant than the countervailing complaints of the vanity of knowledge, from Solomon downwards. We are inclined to say, after listening to some writers' pæans over the joys of culture, that "they do protest too much". Take, for instance, that famous allegation of Montesquieu, in his somewhat too complacent sketch of his own character: "Study has been for me a sovereign remedy against the disgusts of life, as I have never had a chagrin which an hour's reading did not dissipate". There is, I believe, a not uncommon disposition to sympathise with the lady who said that the one sentiment which that philosophic reflection aroused in her was a desire to throw some of the philosopher's sources of consolation at his head; and indeed it reads very significantly in context with the immediately preceding remark of the writer as to the fate of some of his early attachments. But while we adjudge Montesquieu to have been a somewhat exceptionally placid type, we cannot refuse to believe his testimony as to the happiness he found in the life of ideas. It breathes through all his writing, be it superficial or sagacious, in a tone of assured tranquillity or good-humor, which the reader feels to have come of long enjoyment of that best of all good society, the companionship of the library.

And from a multitude of men who do not pro-

of comfort—surely as piercing a vision of human woe as many a line in Dante's Hell.

And yet see how, all through this life till near the end, when the fine nature had partially deteriorated under the mere physical strain, Lamb not only kept up his humorous cheerfulness for his sister's sake but really found abundant good in life, good which he has embodied for us in some of the most exquisite writing in all literature. If he had done nothing but call attention to the values of half-forgotten work he would have done greatly for his fellows and proved a rare power of fortitude and self-discipline; but besides doing that he has added something to the total territory of mind by the side lights of his genius on the every-day life he knew, and the lovely rendering he gives us of the tender joys of his and his sister's comradeship. It makes us think better of all human nature to follow them by the glimpses he gives of Elia and his cousin Bridget, scraping and pinching and making merry in poverty, and smiling over it all again in prosperity. And who else has ever so touched with poetry the sheer literal satisfactions of men on the plane of the most ordinary experience? There is no musing on misery and the grave, but the mellowest praise of the world's good things:—

“I am in love with this green earth; the face of town

and country; the unspeakable rural solitudes, and the sweet security of streets. I would set up my tabernacle here. I am content to stand still at the age to which I am arrived, I and my friends; to be no younger, no richer, no handsomer. I do not want to be weaned by age; or drop like mellow fruit, as they say, into the grave. . . . Sun and sky, and breeze, and solitary walks, and summer holidays, and the greenness of fields, and the delicious juices of meats and fishes, and society, and the cheerful glass, and candle-light, and fire-side conversations, and innocent vanities, and jests, and *irony itself*. Do these things go out with life? Can a ghost laugh, or shake his gaunt sides, when you are pleasant with him? And you, my midnight darlings, my Folios! must I part with the intense delight of having you (huge armfuls) in my embraces? Must knowledge come to me, if it come at all, by some awkward experiment of intuition, and no longer by this familiar process of reading?"

Who ever before had thus touched with feeling such elements in life; making even eating and drinking rank with perfect fitness and naturalness among the pleasures of the spirit, and with simple profundity piercing to the inward poetry of the life of towns in that phrase "the sweet security of streets". But if Lamb could thus raise from his marred life the flower of a tender contentment, the cause was that to a moral genius as rare as his literary faculty he was able to bring the balm and nutriment of books. Of course, some men can get outside their troubles by methods of a lower kind; but here at least there could have been no other adequate solace; and we have to remember that Mary

Lamb too, under her affliction, found consolation in her brother's tasks. If then two such lives as these could be kept sweet at heart and dignified in bearing by the ministry of a culture which after all was not very far-reaching, tried by the standards of to-day, we may I think take it as proved that less crushing troubles may be charmed into bearableness by resort to the spells of the intellectual life. To take a less exceptional instance, is there not something attractive and satisfying to the emotional nature in the account of how Macaulay, finding himself balked for the moment in his political career by a passing contagion of foolish bigotry among his constituents, turned with a kind of ecstasy once more to the life of the study; so happy to be again alone with his books that he hardly even winced under his defeat. These sensations of rising above the din of things into a serene air of contemplation and communion with the general mind of man—these are the appanage of the higher life; and we should not refuse to recognise that we are on the outskirts of the same intellectual region even when we read of how Charles Fox, after losing £18,000 at play in one night, could be found next morning on his sofa tranquilly reading an Eclogue of Virgil, finding respite from the stings of a certainly not over-uneasy conscience in that ancient music, which



has lulled so many a scholar's ear across the crowded centuries.

But it is not to be implied, in the citing of such instances, that to realise the boon which culture gives we have to become Charles Lambs or Macaulays; nor is it even to be assumed that culture chiefly consists in the resort to books. There is an egregious one-sidedness in the way in which many literary men assume that culture lies not merely in reading but in certain kinds of reading; narrowing the term down to cover what used to be significantly called polite letters—that is, a certain familiarity with poetry, fiction, and drama, ancient and modern; an easy-going acquaintance with history; a more or less hazy idea of different philosophic systems; and as little science as you could conveniently get along with. Taken as an outline of a system of culture claiming to be ideally adequate, that conception must simply go by the board. Even Mr. Arnold, who is clearly biassed on the academic side, views culture as consisting in the coming in contact with the best ideas on things in general; and unless you are to fall back on a special definition of ideas it is clear that this must involve turning our attention to all sources of ideas as far as may be.

What we are now considering, however, is not, What is the ideal culture, but, What is the nature

of the average reaction of culture on the individual and on the general life? And to answer this rightly we have to realise that culture may take a hundred shapes and may subsist in any degree. Our formula will perhaps keep us right. Culture has two aspects, the objective and the subjective; its value as a means of enabling us to live more efficiently as towards our fellows; its value as a settlement of the issues raised by pessimism, philosophic or other. Now, the standards in the first case are obvious enough, or at least are not obscure; and on the second or self-regarding side the central truth for us is, as I have said, that culture helps life by expanding it—by always holding out fresh possibilities of ideation, and so, in the familiar phrase, taking us out of ourselves. But this taking us out of ourselves is a matter of degree, and is possible for each and everyone of us, broadly speaking, in respect of his range and kind of faculty or capacity for effort. It is no more confined to the study of books than to the use of microscope or telescope or geological hammer, the artist's brush, or the musician's instrument; the essence of it, scientifically speaking, being the doing something which expands the powers and opens the way to new activities. Culture in this fundamental sense is being attained by the artisan at his harmonium, in his degree, as truly as by the

clerk or professional man who takes up a science or a language, or by the student who turns to a new field of history. Each is making something more of himself than he was, and laying up a reserve of pleasurable possibility for the future.

Everybody knows the old saying that if you do not play whist you are preparing for yourself a tedious old age ; but what shall we now say of those who have only whist to trust to ? One of the most familiar proofs of the danger of being without range of occupation is the frequent case of the man of business who, after many years of frugal toil, bethinks himself of enjoying some leisure in his old age, only to discover, when he has settled down to rest, that he has no more faculty of being entertained. The world with its infinite play of surprise lies open to him on all hands, but the powers he once had of being interested in things are atrophied by sheer lack of use. He had chosen to live in one groove, and when he leaves it he finds he can be at ease in no other. There is tragedy here too, surely ; and the lesson is not merely one for the man who seeks no culture, but also for him who seeks it on one line only. To be sure, any sort of specialism in the way of study has immense advantages over the mere specialism of business ; but that too has its risks ; and there is prudence, though there is at the same time exaggeration, in

Professor de Morgan's precept, that one should know everything of something, and something of everything. It is not given to any of us to know something of everything, and it may be doubted whether many even among the specialists know everything of something; but at least we can keep our minds open.

It is impossible to trace, even in outline, all the forms of gain in the process; but emphasis has specially to be laid on the truth that the relation of culture to life is a constant reaction or interaction. On the one hand, culture is an expansion of experience; on the other, every extension of experience gives a new fruitfulness to all the sources of culture. Who does not know how Shakspeare opens up for us with our widening scrutiny of life; how dark sayings become clear one day; how a remembered sorrow deepens the meaning of great music, puts a mysterious memory into starlight and the waving of trees, and makes the march of the clouds a long-drawn interest where once it had been but a fugitive perception? The more we have felt, the more we can feel; and it is sheer fallacy to say, as do the *a priori* pessimists, that the extension is simply one of capacity to feel pain. On the contrary, the all-round extension involves this, that as art of all kinds plays on sad as well as on happy experience, the sadness is made to pay

tribute to joy, since every good artistic product, literary or other, is in itself a spring of pleasure. Let anyone think of the effect on him of such lines as those in which Keats tells us to look

“ Here where men sit and hear each other groan,  
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs,  
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies,  
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow  
And leaden-eyed despairs;  
Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,  
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.”

It is the very essence of pessimism if you will: but who does not delight in the distillation; and who would not dispense with many very solid satisfactions to retain the subtle one of knowing Keats's Ode? And is it not one of our consolations in thinking of his short life that he found his reward in achieving beauty in his saddest song?

But if what is primarily sad in life can thus be made to minister good, equally certain is it that widening knowledge of everything around is a perpetual fountain of pleasurable sensation. Of all the foolish things ever said about the effects of new ideas, perhaps the foolishhest is that whimsy of the poets about the charm of nature being destroyed by the discoveries of science. Keats said it, and Edgar Poe said it, but it was the sheerest boyish petulance in both. It was

not only not true: it was the absolute reverse of the truth.

It may indeed be true that poetry has not yet quite caught up the results of the other intellectual activities of the latter times; that it is too much given to haunting the past, and is thus imitative, and timid about new conditions. But the poetic motive is there for the eyes that can see it. Listen to the note that comes from Emerson when he would express the manifolding of his sensations by what he knows of the world's history. "Nature is sanative, refining, elevating. How cunningly she hides every wrinkle of her inconceivable antiquity under roses, and violets, and morning dew! Every inch of the mountains is scarred by unimaginable convulsions, yet the new day is purple with the bloom of youth and love. Look out into the July night, and see the broad belt of silver flame which flashes up the half of heaven, fresh and delicate as the bonfires of the meadow flies. Yet the power of numbers cannot compute its enormous age—lasting as space and time—embosomed in time and space." Here is a much deeper and truer statement of experience than Arnold's poem on 'The Future', moving and beautiful as that is, with its protest that the universe was more meaningful to primeval eyes than to ours to-day. That is after all only a poet's

sigh ; the rigorous truth is in the other poet's prose. His feeling for the immensity of nature is an added something which nothing could make up to antique ignorance. The native Siberian, we are told, can see the satellites of Jupiter with the naked eye ; but the European eye that is taught to look can see a vista and a galaxy beside which the barbarian's firmament is but a dark dome fretted with points of fire.

To come finally to our first ground of the relation between culture and the general forward movement of men, we have to note the *per contra* to the fact which forced itself upon us, that culture could and often did leave men fast in the clutches of prejudice ; their consciousness of their range of ideas only serving to make them more aggressive and more mischievous when they carried their prejudice into action. The drawback is one which it would be a serious oversight to ignore ; but against it we are now able to set two balancing principles. First, it is obvious that for mankind in the mass culture is the great solvent of prejudice of the cruder sort. As travel and intercourse with aliens are sure correctives of the subrational antipathies of race, so the brushing against ideas, even at random, is on a large scale irresistibly destructive of our old-world superstitions, our class jealousies, our local vanities, our social bigotries, and even to

some extent of our hypocrisies—perhaps the most adhesive coating of all.

As in our intercourse with men we gradually learn to read their worst weaknesses easily, and to estimate aright the boaster and the sentimentalist, so in our intercourse with moral and other ideas we learn to probe the emptier forms of declamation, which is a gain, even if we learn ourselves to produce some of a higher order. Happiness, according to Swift, who anticipated some pessimist conclusions, is a property of being well deceived ; but we find a happiness in ascertaining that we are less easily deceived than we used to be. And our next consideration is after all only an extension of this. Our safeguard against erring as great men of culture have erred, is that their lives have become part of our stock of experience. For they are finally to be regarded by the humanity which follows them as data in the general order of Nature, as parts of that coherent whole to which it is our task to adjust ourselves ; and if we will we may learn from them the open secret of their moral mechanism. The ancient "Know thyself", we have been told, is an impracticable precept, to be superseded by the more feasible "Know what thou canst work at". But it is just the determining difference between the ancient and the modern way of thought that what was of old indeed an impossible precept



becomes for us a focussing of all the lines of human attention to the most practical of all purposes.

To know ourselves, in the new sense, will be to know Nature first, and then to know our place in it ; till we find the right relations for our moral action as fully as we have found them for the physical. The process of learning, for the race as a whole, is indeed a wasteful one, as Nature's processes mostly are ; but to know this is after all to grasp a truth which can reconcile us to miscarriages that would otherwise seem merely ruinous. Humanity carries in its history, like the mountains of Emerson's figure, the marks of many a dread convulsion and many a dark age of slow corrosion ; its face, like that of Freedom in Bryant's song,

" is scarred  
With tokens of old wars, its massive limbs  
Are strong with struggling."

But of mankind as of the planet its dwelling-place we can say that its own life for ever robes it anew in beauty and hope ; and the latest of its generations, for many an age to come, will indeed be

"Ancients of the earth and in the morning of the times."

## MACHIAVELLI AND CALVIN.

(1897.)

### I.

It was never quite clear for what end the Romanes Lecture was founded, and even Mr. Morley's brilliant discourse on Machiavelli can hardly be said to throw any new light on the subject. Studious, well-documented, abreast of current foreign criticism, and written with reticent force, it has the high and rare literary quality which belongs to all Mr. Morley's work, save that of his earlier years. There could not, indeed, be a better popular introduction than two-thirds of it would supply to a new translation of, say, 'The Prince'. But as a discourse in the Sheldonian Theatre at Oxford, from one of the leading Liberal statesmen of the day, upon a special lecture foundation, supposed to elicit the ripe reflections of distinguished writers, the treatise leaves a somewhat baffled impression, a sense of confusion as regards the result, and of want of plan as regards the undertaking. One is withheld from saying that it has missed its mark only because one cannot be quite sure what mark was aimed at.

As a sympathetic and intelligent account of

Machiavelli and his chief work, Mr. Morley's essay is in large measure admirable. He sensibly puts aside at the outset, after recalling it, the conventional attitude in regard to his subject—a course not indeed original or difficult at this time of day, but not to be made light of on that account—and he supplies the running reader with an excellent distillation of the sadly diffuse and no less sadly pedantic work of Professor Villari—a valuable pile of materials, but an ill-built book. At the close of his lecture, however—here conforming to the vacillation of Villari, but showing also a touch of his own tendency—Mr. Morley pulls up with a judgment which puts Machiavelli morally out of court in the old fashion, as if with the idea of pillorying in his person certain political types of our own day. It is here that we seem to see a mark aimed at, and it is here that we feel the bolt to have been somewhat inadvertently shot. "If," decides Mr. Morley, "Machiavelli had been at Jerusalem two thousand years ago, he would have found nobody of any importance in his eyes, save Pontius Pilate and the Roman legionaries. He forgot the potent arms of moral force. . . ." In the interests of exact thought, one is moved to ask what is the point or relevance of that observation as an answer to Machiavelli.

Let us grant Mr. Morley his conventional assumption that the Christian system was really set

up by the "moral force" of a Jesus of Nazareth, who was put to death by the Romans at Jerusalem about nineteen hundred years ago. Does that assumption affect in any degree the practical accuracy of Machiavelli's estimate of the political conditions of antiquity and of his own land and day? Supposing a Jewish Machiavelli to have said in Jesus' day what Machiavelli said in his, that the unarmed prophet always falls, and to have seen nobody of political importance in Jerusalem but the Roman procurator and his force, would he have misjudged the case *as regards Jerusalem*, as regards the fortunes of the Jewish State? Machiavelli was an Italian writing for Italy, a Florentine thinking of the prospects of Florence. With his cast of mind, supposing him to have lived in the Jesuine Jerusalem, he would have thought of conserving the political and social life of Jewry, of driving out the Romans, of restoring the Maccabean State. Would it be any valid moral indictment of a man so placed to say that, seeing as he did the impossibility of saving Jewry by the methods of the prophets, new or old, he "forgot the potent arms of moral force" when as he simply said what he felt and knew, instead of dimly speculating on what might come of the Jesuine cult in other lands and other ages, from three hundred to three thousand years later, after Jerusalem had been razed to the ground and

the Jewish people scattered to the ends of the earth? We have granted Mr. Morley his literary assumption of the strict actuality of the Jesus of the Gospels. But would he really ask us to grant him that any man in Jerusalem, on Crucifixion Day or three days after, or thirty years later, could conceivably have looked beyond the still distant ruin of the city and the nation to a future of ecclesiastical or moral influence for the supposititious lore of the deceased prophet? Would not any such vision have been as blankly miraculous as the prophet's alleged resurrection itself? The very sacred books of the cult exhibit, instead of any belief among the early Christians in a transforming politico-moral force in their gospel, a universal expectation of the end of the world, which was to be wound up as a bankrupt concern. It is a tolerably perverse criticism that in this connection accuses the Machiavelli type of "forgetting" what it is not pretended that Paul could have remembered, or Epictetus or Marcus Aurelius in his day surmised.

Mr. Morley does give a certain practical application to his otherwise ill-aimed criticism by going on to cite Calvin as having seen what Machiavelli did not see, and done "in fact what Machiavelli tried to do on paper. He actually created a self-governed State, ruled it, defended it, maintained it." And it was with the potent arms of

moral force, Mr. Morley says, that "in the main, Calvin fought his victorious battle", Yet he immediately goes on to admit that Calvin "was as ready to resort to carnal weapons as other people", and that much of his procedure can be justified only on "principles that are much the same as, and certainly not any better than, those prescribed for the tyrant in 'The Prince'." It is after the chessboard has been thus alternately called white and black that we get the final dictum: "*Still*, the Republic of Geneva was the triumph of moral force." The argument seems to be, then, that Machiavelli fell short of Calvin, in that he did not think of employing Calvin's moral in addition to his carnal methods for the solution of the problem of Italy. There we are at least on solidier argumentative ground than in the thesis "If Machiavelli went to Jerusalem—."

"Still," to use Mr. Morley's powerful copulative, the argument of the prosecution seems sufficiently far-fetched. Let us first put the case: "If Calvin had gone to Florence—?" He actually did go to Italy, to the Court of the Duchess of Ferrara, the brilliant daughter of Louis XII, and one of the crowned protectors of the Reform; but it was only on a tentative visit, and with the problem of religion and politics in Italy he never sought to meddle. We have only to imagine him in Machiavelli's place, in order to realise the situa-

tion. Could he conceivably have done there what he was able to do at Geneva? Could he have written any book which would have brought to Italy the political salvation of which Machiavelli dreamed? The question need only be put to be put aside. One is moved to quote to Mr. Morley some of Mr. Morley's words of a few years ago: "It is irrational to contrast Carlyle's heroes, Cromwell, Mirabeau, Frederick, Napoleon, with men like Washington or Lincoln. The circumstances were different. The conditions of public use and of personal greatness were different."\* Were they any more different than in the cases of Machiavelli and Calvin?

## II.

Calvin, let it be granted without cavil, was one of the greatest men of his generation, alike in strength of character and in systematising power, practical and ratiocinative, within the limits of the Christian scheme of dogma. If Luther and Thomas Aquinas were great men, Calvin certainly was. With a body so frail that it reeled under the stress of his sleepless energies, he had yet a power of will which could dominate for a generation the turbulence of an old free-city of the Middle Ages; and, while his system of doc-

\* 'Studies in Literature,' 1891, p. 181 (art. 'A few words on French models').

trine was incisive and impressive enough to impose itself on the Protestant cleries of several foreign countries, it was couched for his own in a style which ranks him as one of the founders of modern French prose—this by the admission of many enemies. Estimating men in the only rational way—that is, comparatively—we must class him among the strongest of his time. But if we are asked to credit him with a wisdom or insight or practical grasp which, by force of superior moral quality, went deeper and further than that of Machiavelli, we must decisively refuse assent.

Let us briefly scan the Frenchman's career. In his youth he may or may not have pondered the political case of France as a whole, as Machiavelli did that of Italy; may or may not have dreamt of "shaping the whisper of a throne" and affecting the general history of his nation. His early commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia* was indeed an effort in that direction. But we know that he soon gave up the hope of directly influencing the political course of France, and decided to seek harborage in some quiet haven beyond her frontiers. When he fled from Paris, at the age of twenty-four, it was for ever. His *Institutio Christianæ Religionis* (1536) is inscribed to King Francis; but he expressly avows that when he first set hand to the work nothing was further from his thoughts than to write anything for pre-



sentation to the king. It was a systematic exposition and defence of the Huguenot creed, so stamped by Calvin's logic and temper as to stand out from both the Lutheran and the Zwinglian systems which had preceded it. In virtue of its learning, its rigor, and its coherence, it had an extraordinary influence in its century; and when, in the year of its issue, Calvin chanced by mere accident to pass through Geneva on his way to Basel, its already great repute sufficed to make Farel and the other reformers in the place seize upon him as their pre-destined leader. This episode reveals better than any historical summary the impression of inward energy and compulsive power which Calvin made on the men of his way of thinking. Farel, the stormy petrel of reform, the very daimon of proselytism, saw in Calvin a man born for the rounding of a work which he himself could only rough-hew. It needed his absolute adjuration to make Calvin stay, the theologian having planned for himself a life of study and authorship far from political turmoil; but, the decision once reluctantly taken, it was acted on with a determination which never flinched before opposition, execration, exile, or civil war. Calvin was in truth the master spirit of the Genevan Republic till his death, save in the interlude of his three years' exile in Strassburg.

Was his success, then, a triumph of "moral

force"? It assuredly was not, and it is astonishing that Mr. Morley should say so, even with sweeping qualifications. To begin with, Calvin found a Huguenot polity actually established before his arrival, and guarded by the surest of fortifications—the appropriation of the Church's possessions in the hands of the State or the lay notables. This, the bulwark of the Reformation in Saxony and in England, was the determining force in Switzerland.\* In certain cantons the peasants welcomed the Reform, in the belief that it meant their escape from the fiscal and other burdens of the Papal régime; but when they found that it only meant change of officials and masters, they indignantly restored the old faith,† thus dramatically putting on record the importance of the economic element in the Reformation. But in the organised cities of Geneva and Zürich and Bern, the rich citizens who had engineered the revolution were able to hold what they had taken. The return of Catholicism would mean, for them, the disgorging of it all, and more besides; and that was an argument over which there

\* In Zürich, the first canton to adopt Protestantism, the twenty-four Catholic canons compounded for pensions, many of them turning Protestant. Later, Zürich and Glarus plundered the Abbey of St. Gall, and sold the pile and its lands to the town of the same name.

† Zschokke, *Schweizerlands Geschichte*, 9te Ausg., cap. 32. These items are usually ignored in English histories of Switzerland.

could be no vacillation. Wealth which had been practically in foreign hands—since of all the many prebendaries of the Geneva Cathedral in 1527, only one was a native‡—was now in the coffers of the ruling citizens; and there it must stay. Thus all the military power of several of the great city cantons, despite their hereditary jealousies, was available for a joint resistance to the Catholic enemy without and within; and a power of self-defence which had repelled all feudal attacks for hundreds of years could be trusted to resist the divided forces of the disorganised Church.§ The view, then, that Calvin “actually created a self-governed State, defended it, maintained it,” is not only a bad literal mis-statement

‡ Vieusseux, ‘History of Switzerland,’ p. 120.

§ Mr. Charles Beard, whose Hibbert Lectures on the Reformation are perhaps the best general sketch of the subject in English, rightly notes how the fortunes of the Reformation turned everywhere on the political conditions: “In Germany it was a necessity of the case that the subject should follow the religion of his ruler: but for the succession of three devoutly Protestant Electors, the Reformation could not have subsisted in Saxony. When Duke Henry succeeded Duke George, his people abandoned Catholicism at once: with the best will in the world, Protestantism was unable to maintain itself in Austria and Bavaria. But in Zürich, in Basel, in Bern, the Church and the State were administered through the same institutions by the same persons. Each step in the process of revolt against Catholicism, of the adoption of Protestantism, was marked by a public debate, and a solemn decision arrived at by the authorities of the city.” Work cited, p. 237.

of historic fact, but a serious misapprehension of all the essentials of the case.

Certainly Calvin reorganised the polity of Geneva, alike in the affairs of Church and State. But how? Not by setting up a moral unity through moral means; not by reconciling Protestant and Catholic, Libertarian and Ascetic; but by aggrandising more and more the Huguenot element, and driving out all others, till the city had become simply a Puritan stronghold hieratically ruled, and no longer a free State in the sense of a many-colored population united for municipal purposes, and living in reasonable liberty as regarded thought and conduct. The perennial problem of politics is the harmonising of conflicting interests, the securing of the greatest liberty compatible with the common weal. Machiavelli, living in the anarchic Italy of the Borgias and the Medici, in presence of an ingrained and internecine egoism of faction and city and tyrant, to which there seemed no possible end by way of voluntary combination, taught how a strong prince might subdue the whole medley of warring groups to an orderly rule. Could the task have been carried through by his model, Cæsar Borgia, than whom no man of that age was better fitted to undertake it, there would probably have been at least as much normal freedom of life and thought in Italy as

subsisted either before or after Machiavelli's time, and the domineering foreigner would in the terms of the scheme have been driven out. A solution such as Calvin's was not only impossible; it would not have seemed to Machiavelli worth dreaming. In Italy, Protestantism was economically impotent: the wealth of the Church, there held only by the natives, ruled the situation, and a reign of anti-Papal Presbyterianism was entirely out of the question. Not one man in a thousand would have thought such a life worth living. Before Machiavelli's problem, Calvin, as Protestant Pope, would have been absolutely helpless.

In Geneva, the situation was as different as between any two independent cities it could possibly be. The Protestant interest held the wealth of the Church, the offices of State, the military control of the canton. In the terms of the case, the Catholic party was already in part exiled. Calvin's task was to reduce it to nullity, and at the same time to cause the rule of the Huguenot priesthood to control the whole field of public and private life. This he undertook with an austerity of courage which, in its own way, certainly cannot be overrated. Under his lead, the ecclesiastical body, recruited by Huguenot zealots from all parts of France, set about forcing all men to live in rigid conformity to the

Puritan ideal. Let a Unitarian Protestant describe the process:—

“Adultery was repeatedly punished with death. A child was beheaded for having struck father and mother. Banishment, imprisonment, in some cases drowning, were penalties inflicted on unchastity. To sing, or even to have in one's possession, lewd songs, was a crime; to laugh at Calvin's sermons, or to have spoken hot words of him in the street, was a crime; to wear clothes of forbidden stuff or make was a crime; to give a feast to too many guests, or of too many dishes, was a crime. . . . Everybody was obliged to attend public worship; everybody was required to partake of the Lord's Supper; no sick man might lie in bed for three days without sending for the minister of the parish. . . . In the years 1558-1559 alone there were in the little city—[of some twenty thousand inhabitants]—414 of such prosecutions. Now and then, as might be expected, there was a sharp spasm of rebellion against so grinding a tyranny. . . . Some man, or, as often, some woman, was goaded into open revolt, which almost inevitably took such a form as gave a plausible pretext for fresh severity on the part of the guardians of faith and order. Then the prison, the pillory, the scaffold did their work, and the reign of repressive holiness was resumed.”\*

To call such a policy an application of moral force is surely the merest perversion of language. It is true that Calvin must have had in himself moral force to keep the clergy and the municipality docile to his will; but in that sense moral force has never been lacking where a tyrant maintained himself. As Hume has it, “it is on

\* Beard as cited, pp. 250-551

opinion only that government is founded ; and this maxim extends to the most despotic and most military governments, as well as to the most free and most popular." And in Calvin's case the "opinion" was made to his hand by a process of artificial selection. Mr. Morley, in this connection, should recall his own criticism of Lange, that "the writer, like most historians of opinion, does not dwell sufficiently on the co-operation of external social conditions with the progress of logical inference."† The clerical party needed Calvin as Zürich needed Zwingli : there was no other who could stay in the saddle. At the very outset of his reign, Geneva was largely stocked with foreign ecclesiastics, mostly French ; the Catholic clergy, who were almost to a man Italians, having been driven out in mass. Only a rigorous discipline could have enabled the new set of outsiders to keep up the religious influence to which they owed their status ; but they, on the other hand, gave Calvin a very strong backing. In his first attempt to constitute his rule by their means he failed. "I am not sure," writes Mr. Beard, "that if he had had to deal with it alone he would ever have succeeded. But Geneva soon became a city of refuge."‡ It was really so before Calvin arrived,

† 'Diderot', note to ch. 3.

‡ Lectures cited, p. 245.

and the influx steadily continued. § Thus when, after two years of Calvin's growing tyranny, the native Libertarian party succeeded in expelling him for contumacy, the clergy of the Protestant interest in general soon realised to the full how much they owed him; and they never rested till they got him back from Strassburg, where his unique faculty for discipline had speedily gained him just such a hold and such a following as he had in Geneva. From the day of his return till his death, he maintained his tyranny without a slip, punishing with a cold ferocity every whisper of criticism directed against himself, crushing every symptom of heresy, from the smallest to the greatest; limiting all intellectual activity as far as possible to theology, suppressing the theatre, suppressing art, suppressing secular music, blighting literature, strangling joy. Posing as the representative of a Draconic Christ, he undertook likewise to abolish sin. The result of his method, we now learn from those who have studied the Genevan records, was that the registers abounded in entries of illegitimate births, such children being constantly found exposed; that there were multitudes of forced marriages, in which the parties were led from the prison to the altar; and many "hideous trials



for obscenity"; besides endless venomous quarrels within families.\* Of the atrocities of his régime, we hear chiefly of the burning of Servetus and the beheading of Gruet, acts now defended by our Protestant moralists on the ground that the first was approved of by the "gentle Melanchthon" and that both were in keeping with the spirit of the time. It does not seem to occur to those moralists that the same standards would exculpate Cæsar Borgia, and leave Machiavelli blameless. On the same principle, nothing is to be made of the fact that under the Calvinist as under the Papal rule, criminals were usually tortured; that a hundred and fifty persons were burned for witchcraft† in the little town of Geneva in the space of sixty years; that thirty-one were burnt at one time, on the charge of spreading the plague; and that under Calvin's personal rule there were passed in three years fifty-eight sentences of death, seventy-six of banishment, and between 8,000 and 9,000 of imprisonment.‡ But when we are considering

\* See the passage cited by Mr. Beard (p. 252) from Galiffe, in Henry's *Leben Calvins*, ii, 78. See it also in Audin's *Vie de Calvin*, ch. 39.

† Mr. Beard puts these horrors to the credit of the age in general; but it is alleged (Audin, ch. 25, citing Fazy) that before the Reformation witchcraft was not in Geneva punished by death, and that torture was almost unknown.

‡ Hug and Stead's 'Switzerland', p. 285.

the claim made for a given system of government, that it was in the main a "triumph of moral force," as compared with the methods prescribed by Machiavelli, these details are a main part of our data for a judgment, and we can only say that they reduce the claim to absurdity. A religion which transforms a once reasonably-happy community to a kind of frozen hell of austerity and retribution and secret sin, may serve to prove the energy and capacity of the man who compasses it; but it is a singular phenomenon to set up as a shining moral contrast to the regimen of 'The Prince'.

The ghastliness of Calvin's "triumph" is glossed over for Protestants in general by the application to the case of a sectarian ethic which distorts every historical fact, holding up to one half of things a convex mirror, and to the other half a concave. The blind and blundering cruelty of Calvin's system of deterrence, civil and religious, is supposed to be atoned for by the fact that it set its face like flint against adultery and fornication, card-playing and bad language. Under our grotesque Christian ethic, it is always wicked to love your neighbour's wife, but pardonable in the sixteenth century to imprison your neighbour for criticising your preaching. Fornication is always deadly sin, because Moses and Jesus condemned it; but the torturing of

myriads of miserable men, and the slaying, by extreme agony of fire, of hundreds of stricken wretches for an offence the belief in which is a hallucination, is all a mere regrettable conformity to the tendencies of your age. So long as you suppose you are doing God service, a thousand judicial murders constitute but a venial error. If, however, with some of the Anabaptists, you happen to reach the conviction that God gave you your sexual instinct for gratification, your religious belief only doubles your crime!

In a sociological enquiry, we may without misgiving set these theological harmonies aside, and sum up for ourselves in terms of rational politics and rational ethics—in this case to the effect that if Machiavelli “forgot the potent arms of moral force,” Calvin did not contrive to discover them. Mr. Morley seems to have accepted the view of the late Mark Pattison that Calvin’s system of discipline was, as it were, a great fortress set up against the assault of Papalism, a wall behind which thought and scholarship could breathe in freedom. The more closely that theory is scrutinised, the more clearly will it be seen to be a delusion. On the one hand, Calvinism did not, any more than Lutheranism, offer the slightest encouragement to independent thought, once the authority of Rome was set

aside. Its very purpose, as a system, was to preclude all new thought, and it emphatically had that effect. One would suppose, from the language used concerning Geneva as a "centre of light," that it had been distinguished for original learning, or science, or research, or philosophy. As a matter of fact, it yielded few such fruits: its "light" was simply the publication of Calvin's system to other communities; and it would be hard to find between Beza and Rousseau a single Genevan name of intellectual importance. Calvinism did not even succeed in spreading Protestantism in Switzerland: from the day of the Catholic reaction of 1533 in Soleure, the boundaries of the two faiths in the Confederation have remained unchanged. A fair test of the value of the Calvinist system to civilisation elsewhere may be found in the culture-history of Calvinistic Scotland between Knox and Hume. Before the Reformation Scotland had the beginnings of a poetic and dramatic literature of extraordinary power; but from that generation onwards, for nearly two hundred years, there is produced, with one or two exceptions, such as Napier's Logarithms and Rutherford's *Lex Rex*, nothing but worthless cartloads of theology. Art and artistic literature practically disappear; and the revival of the eighteenth century is clearly due to the

fresh rationalistic stimulus received from France.

As to the military resistance offered by Calvinist discipline to the Counter-Reformation, we have only to compare the fortunes of Protestantism in different regions, in order to recognise Mr. Pattison's fallacy. We have already seen some of the reasons for deciding that economic and political forces counted for more than any other in the durable establishment of the Reformation. Intellectually speaking, it was nowhere stronger than in France; but there it finally succumbed, though the discipline and doctrine of the Huguenots in general were substantially those of Calvin. The reasons for the gradual collapse after the wars were clearly political and socio-economic. In Saxony, again, as in England and Denmark, it held its ground under a non-Calvinist discipline, and this too for political and economic reasons. Why then should we suppose that it needed the Calvinist discipline to enable it to hold its ground in Switzerland, where the political and economic forces were in any case so strongly on its side? Or, if it *had* failed in Switzerland, what would have been the difference as regarded the rest of Europe? What ideas, what culture, what light would have been lost to civilisation? Might not even the remaining Protestantism have been

saved much of that immeasurable animosity which turned it to intellectual confusion and put an end to its critical advance? As early as 1553 the Lutherans were treating the Calvinists as worse enemies than the Papists; even as Calvin was teaching, concerning Protestant sectaries and Catholics, that "both alike well deserve to be repressed by the sword."\* "So soon," sighs the historian, "had died away even the faintest echo of that claim of liberty of conscience in which the Reformation took its birth; so soon had new and more savage theological hatreds replaced the old."†

### III.

That historic collapse of Protestant ethics under the stress of political strife might be supposed to warn at least Rationalists against the platitude of pronouncing that Machiavelli "divorced" politics from ethics. Mr. Morley says this in one breath, and in the next shows that politics and ethics were no more divorced in Machiavelli's hands than in those of other practical politicians before and since. What Machiavelli did was to show with an absolute candor what the ethics of Italian public life really were for his

\* Letter to the Protector Somerset, 1548.

† Beard, as cited, p. 183.

day. If he is to be criticised as separating politics from morals, then Calvin and Luther did so no less, only practising self contradiction and self-deception where he is transparent and consistent. It is very certain that he introduced into life no new principle of evil. In the words of Villari, "Theoretically the Middle Ages admitted no difference between the conduct of individual and of public life, *although practically the difference was then more marked than at any other time.* . . . . The Renaissance, on the contrary, recognised, and even exaggerated, this difference."<sup>‡</sup> The new Protestants, again, lacking the dry light of the Italian humanist, contributed *their* moral contradiction in the form of an entire failure to reach any sense of reciprocity. It is their peculiar infamy, as an ethical school, to have constantly denied to others the rights they claimed for themselves. Calvin clamoring against the repulsion of his fellow-Calvinists from Denmark and the Lutheran seaports, while counselling the suppression of other sects; Luther making war on Anabaptists and Calvinists; Knox hounding every Catholic priest out of Scotland; the French Huguenots suppressing all Catholic worship in their cities; Milton and Cromwell flaming against the

<sup>‡</sup> *Niccolò Machiavelli*, Eng. tr. 1892, pref.

massacre of the Vaudois, and exulting over the massacre of the Irish—these are the types of the public ethics of the Reformers; and it was only the severe exigencies of politics that ever compelled the majority of them to practise the rudiments of tolerance.

It was his very unscrupulousness in this regard that secured Calvin's success, such as it was. From the first, he made it his business to drive out the disaffected and replace them with sworn French Huguenots. After suppressing the insurrection of 1555, and killing or imprisoning the leaders, he got rid of the bulk of the faction, and introduced in their stead 359 French families. From first to last, 1,300 French and 300 Italian families seem to have settled in Geneva during his reign\*—a Babylonish way of settling political problems, which would have been regarded by Machiavelli under the alternative titles of barbarism and failure. It is perhaps going too far to say, with Cavour, that "anybody can govern in a state of siege": it doubtless requires capacity to keep up the state of siege; but that method is really not an application of "the potent arms of moral force." Nor did Calvin sow the seeds of civic peace for posterity. The city repelled the treacherous attack of the Duke

\* Hug and Stead, pp. 286-7.



of Savoy in 1602, as feudal attacks had been repelled by the Swiss cities in the past; but it was "the scene of so much agitation and civil contention during the eighteenth century as to have acquired the character of being the most turbulent republic of modern times."<sup>†</sup> Such was the sequel to the supreme discipline. If we are to mete out praise to any statesman of those days for success with the arms of moral force, it is not Calvin, but John Cebly of Glarus, who should receive it.

"He succeeded, after a long strife, in having a commission appointed, consisting of thirty members, half of each party, who drew the articles of a treaty of pacification, including a general amnesty for the past. It was an edict of mutual toleration, which has ever since maintained peace in that little country, where Protestants and Catholics have continued to this day to live mixed together in harmony . . . and in several parishes performing their respective services one after the other in the same church."<sup>\*</sup>

We can imagine what Calvin thought of that settlement, which was made before his day of power. It is on record that he disparaged Zwingli, a humaner and a better man than he, who, had he not been struck down at Cappel,

<sup>†</sup> Viesseux, p. 202.

<sup>\*</sup> Viesseux, p. 134. In the Grisons, similarly, Catholics and Protestants agreed on political reforms, without any fighting. After pacifying his own canton, Cebly arranged a peace between two groups of Protestant and Catholic cantons who were in arms against each other in 1529.

fighting against his judgment, would probably have harvested as much "triumph" as Calvin did at Geneva. As it was, Calvin built on his foundations.

But what specially concerns us here is that both cases alike go to prove the absolute truth, for his age, of Machiavelli's summing up that the unarmed prophet always failed. Calvin, whom Mr. Morley so oddly cites as evidence to the contrary, was even on Mr. Morley's own showing the armed prophet *in excelsis*, more truly so than Zwingli, who fell in battle. Luther, backed by a feudal potentate, was to all intents and purposes in the same case; Knox was no less so. One unarmed prophet there was in those days, whom one likes to remember for that unique characteristic, which makes him so modern a figure among that bitter breed of Bibliolators—Caspar Schwenkfeld, the Silesian aristocrat. A convert to Lutheranism, he drew away from parts of Luther's system, wherefor "Luther repulsed him with the bitterest reproaches," and Melancthon, "the gentle," got him excommunicated. "The much-enduring man took up his abode, first in one city of Southern Germany, then in another, always collecting about him a little circle of adherents, whom he organised in a congregation apart, always writing books which were proscribed and burnt, always opposing to perse-

cution a mild persistence which it was impossible to overcome."† His sect, it seems, still lingers in America; but probably Mr. Morley would not call his results a "triumph." Caring only for the arms of moral force, he was born out of due time, when they were not yet relatively "potent".

And that is, shortly speaking, the sum of the intolerably long-drawn debate over Machiavelli. That 'The Prince' is not a practical manual for to-day, it was really not quite worth Mr. Morley's while to tell us. Yet, at its worst, the book is not justly open to the charge of being anti-moral: to use the words of a sound but little-read historian, "if any man affirms that Machiavelli recommends wicked means, or that he teaches that wicked means are always better adapted to accomplish the end than what we call good means, he has either not read Machiavelli, or he cannot understand him."\* In point of fact, Machiavelli was so far from teaching statesmen to rely on mere force that, as Mr. Morley notes, he repeatedly counsels princes to establish themselves, above all things, on the goodwill of their subjects; and he was actually condemned by Guicciardini for his excessive

† Beard, p. 213.

\* George Long, 'Decline of the Roman Republic,' vol. 1, pref.

opposition to fortresses and fire-arms. "Machiavelli and his school," says Mr. Morley in his peroration, "saw *only* cunning, jealousy, perfidy, ingratitude, duplicity; and yet on such a foundation as this, they dreamed that they could build. What idealist or doctrinaire ever fell into a stranger error?" It is a pity that the peroration should thus encroach on the argument. The "only" is only rhetoric. Machiavelli did see in abundance the characteristics named, as Mr. Morley and the rest of us can see them in our own day; but he never suggested that these were the "only" forces at work around him. He knew as well as Mr. Morley that nobody could "build" with mere elements of disintegration; nay, that a State could not be held together by them in any form for a day; he implies as much in every page.

Let us take a sample test sentence from his *Life of Castruccio Castracani*†:—"He (Cas-

† Near the end. It may be worth noting that in the English translation, reprinted under the late Professor Henry Morley's editorship in the same vol with 'The Prince', the passage here cited is introduced by the sentence: "He had all the qualities that make a man great." *There is no such phrase in the original*: it seems to have been inserted by the translator merely to break a somewhat abrupt transition. Professor Morley in his preface declaims violently over the low ethic of the Italians of Machiavelli's day, but seems to have taken no pains to check the treacheries of the English translations he reprinted. This one in particular is quite untrustworthy.

truccio) was grateful (*grato*) to his friends, terrible to his enemies, just with his subjects, faithless with foreigners; and where he could conquer by ruse (*fraude*) he never troubled to conquer by force, because, he said, it is the victory, and not the mode of the victory, that gives glory." Here we have presented to us the typical Renaissance hero, "faithless with foreigners," yet scrupulous towards his subjects and loyal to his friends. The truth was that in that time States and rulers counted each other mostly as latent enemies, and tended in times of peace to observe to each other in part the ethic of the state of war, which even in our days, as Mr. Morley notes, prescribes deceit as a matter of course. Perhaps no chapter in Machiavelli's writings has given rise to more outcry than that\* in which he so tranquilly discusses "How princes ought to keep their promises." Yet the gist of that chapter is simply the plain declaration of what nearly every European ruler has always taken for granted, that, in dealings with a rival State, one should be ready to throw up a treaty at the most advantageous moment, lest the other party should do it beforehand, as is always likely. "A prudent prince"—thus runs Machiavelli's counsel—"ought not to keep his

\* 'Prince,' ch. 18

word when to do so would injure him, and *when the grounds on which he gave his promise no longer exist.*" If princes or peoples were never more unscrupulous than that, history would be pleasanter reading. The criticism which passes on the candid avowal of the principle a blame that is not passed on the act, expresses a lower standard of honesty than Machiavelli's. His doctrine in 'The Prince', be it remembered, is the extreme stretch of what he felt to be necessary to the preservation of a prince in Papal Italy, where every ruler carried his fortunes in his hand. In his 'Discourses on Livy'\* he expressly remarks that he does not confound stratagem or deceit (*fraude*) in war, which he justifies, with "the perfidy which breaks pledged faith and sworn treaties, a perfidy which is always dishonoring, even when it accomplishes the conquest of a State or of an entire realm." And when he says† that a prince must "*learn to be able to be not good*, but to be one or the other, according to necessity," he is not speaking of justice and righteousness, but, as the context shows, of "goodness" in the sense of liberality and leniency. In fine, one is moved to put aside nine-tenths of the literature of denunciation of Machiavelli, including the sufficiently unedifying

\* iii, 40.

† 'Prince,' ch. 15.

attacks of Voltaire and Frederick the Great, as a mixed mass of misconception and cant; and to say flatly, with George Long, "I declare my conviction of the honesty of the man, and my admiration of his political lessons."

True, his lesson as it stands is not relevant in a modern democracy. But his lesson is not hard to translate into one that is relevant; and the student is driven to say that Mr. Morley finally saddles the wrong horse in this matter. Machiavelli, he sums up, represents still living forces, "because energy, force, will, violence, still keep alive in the world their resistance to the control of justice and conscience, humanity and right." That is to say, Machiavelli makes for such resistance, and we are to regard him as the prophet of modern Jingoism, if not of tyrannous Unionism. With all respect, one must protest that Mr. Morley can have lived little with that clear spirit if he really so conceives him. The sheer intellectuality which shines from Machiavelli's every page is the very negation of the mindlessness which in our day sustains the creed of violence and conquest and oppression. Such a mind as his, loving light and order and steeped in sanity, caring deeply for democracy, and accepting monarchism only as the inevitable, the one way to drive out the foreigner, whose insolent entry was the one thing that stung him to

passion—such a mind as that would not, in our day and country, be found on the side of bombast and tradition, blatant patriotism and ignorant prejudice. Rather, it would keenly contemplate the strife between the party of progress and the party of reaction, and then proceed to frame for the former a scheme and tactic of general action. For what is Machiavelli's great work, in its essential relation to his day, but a reduction of contemporary politics to science by method? And what might not such a mind do for our politics if it could only incarnate itself in one—or, better, in half a dozen—of our Liberal leaders? Laying down Mr. Morley's tantalising discourse, and musing over the perversity of things, one falls to imagining just how the sometime Secretary to the Office of the Ten of Florence, could he be recomposed from the waste and flux of the cosmos, might counsel the sometime Secretary for Ireland.

"Right honorable sir," one seems to hear him say, with a certain antique flavor of speech, "you have been a trifle solemnly censorious of my poor essay of nearly four hundred years ago, conceived, not for all time, but for an age, nay, for private circulation only, as your modern phrase goes. 'Tis a small thing for this huge Europe to keep pothering over, after all that vast vicissitude that lies between. And yet, meseems, you do



not quite confound my simple doctrine. It gravels me that you should look to Geneva for a countervailing instance. Jehan de Noyon, if I gather the history aright, was no unarmed prophet. But in Switzerland, may it please your Excellency, there was no question of looking for strong princes to drive out invaders; the trouble there was not such as ours in Italy, whereupon I wrote. I do not find that the course of our Southern affairs after my day belies much my forecast; and I misdoubt that Maître Jehan could have succeeded there. Sooth to say, after nigh four hundred years, I am not keen on that hypothetical issue. What takes me, rather, in this my dazzling glimpse of your wonderful world, is the question of your problem, your prospects, and your counsels thereon. Of a verity, the world has moved.

"And now, Right Honorable, may I crave light concerning your hopes, your plans? Your Excellency deems me of the school of his Excellency Rhodes, forgetting that your servant was of the Liberal party of Florence, a city culture-crowned. My goodwill is wholly with you of the Liberal faction, so far as my re-born wit can master its knowledge. But I will confess to you that I wonder somewhat at what seems to my eye the slackness of your warfare. In our old Italy, Right Honorable, our strifes were wrought

to a pitch at which the human spirit put forth all its energy of foresight and of effort; my notion in that little book of mine was to put the science of it in a handful for our Medici, whose counsel was precarious. And I should have held *a priori*, as our scholastics would say, that you of to-day would have your science much better in hand, and that long ago. With you, 'tis indeed become a battle of moral force: I felicitate you. But there is an art of war for that battle, too. For our age, I studied brute war, because that was still the dispensation; but would that I might brood out the art of the new war of argument, of persuasion, of criticism, of organisation—the war which will shape the life of the coming century.

“Thus far—dare I make bold to say it?—my cye does not catch the plan of your campaign. It cannot be that your Excellency trusts to fortune, as did so many of our old superstitious ones; yet, if my ears fool me not, here is your posse of captains, in time of peace, waiting idly for the next war, neither exhorting nor drilling, planning nought, gaining over none, unaware even on what issues you will fight. *Per Bacco*, your party is at ease in Zion. Your Excellency honored me by discoursing of my scribblings in the theatre of one of your ancient universities, where, so far as I can see, your party has small

following. Were it not more fitting, Right Honorable, to go about to create in this huge capital of yours a new and great university, on a democratic foot, whereby, haply, Liberal ideas might make head against that union of your aristocracy and plutocracy which has of late been accomplished under your eyes? Believe me, new times for ever need new measures. Nay, was it not your Excellency who wrote, no great time ago, that 'for the practical politician his problem is always individual. For his purposes, history never repeats itself'?\* Your front problem, if I mistake not, is the settlement of your Ireland, whose case in the past, methinks, goes ill with your high appraisement of the arms of moral force in times heretofore. But I let that be. What concerns me is that you should think to solve that problem as God may will, taking no profit from past defeat. Were it not well, now, to scheme it all anew? Thereby might you make that cause the best stake in your hedge. It was industriously done to go to Switzerland for the model of a merely moral republic of my age; but there are models there more pat to your undertaking—a Federal Constitution, to wit. To my judgment, as an old political hand, your Gladstone's plans were over simple: it is ill play-

\* 'Studies in Literature', 1891, p. 182

ing the surgeon with constitutions when you heed not the laws of State anatomy and the functions of the parts.

“Do I weary your Excellency? What I seek to express is my poor notion that you of the Liberal faction should be making a war of reason, in these days, between whiles, building up a party of principle that shall know why it acts, and foresee its way. It is quaint, to my sense, that you should still fight, with all your faith in moral force, by way of periodic war-cries and scuffles of Guelf and Ghibelline. One of my way of thought who should write for your age a treatise to be entitled, say, ‘The Leader’, might say much on these themes! For if it be true, as you say, with an eye askance on me, that there be still among you lovers of violence and abettors of tyranny, it the more behoves such eminent ones as your Excellency to baffle them by creating among your common people and middle orders a reasoned love of civilisation, a habit of mind above all barbarous allurements. I do not find that you or any of your illustrious colleagues are so occupied. Truly you do me too much honor when you turn aside from the manifold problem of your generation to study and indict my unworthy self. I have already surmised that in your day a good half of political science lies in an insight into what you call economics, a

scientific theory of the functions of an industrial society. In my own time I had glimpses of that, the philosophy, so to say, of State. For you to-day, it should seem to be the all-essential learning, wherefrom should proceed your political code and schemata, even as, I learn, your Calvin proceeded—a strange choice—from the sacred Scriptures. But I find that your Excellency is a Gallio in these things, refusing to contemplate an economic policy, of whatsoever species. Nay, by the club of Hercules, I find not that your Excellency wields or sharpens any arm of moral force, save belike in an occasional academic censure of those who filibuster, as you say, in certain wild regions of Africa. But I fear that my Southern vivacity disturbs your Excellency——.”

What Mr. Morley could or would say in answer, how shall anyone else presume to suggest?

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#### POSTSCRIPT.

And in due course came the war in South Africa, wherein Christian England, with store of Methodists and Arminians, if not of Calvinists, took a course that would have made Machiavelli stare! But he could not and would not have demurred to Mr. Morley's resistance, which was bravely and worthily made.

# ENGLAND BEFORE AND SINCE THE FRENCH REVOLUTION.

A LECTURE

(1888.)

## I.

IT is the practice of artists, when they seek to produce the true effect of distance in a landscape, to note carefully the different shades of grey at a further and a nearer point, and then to effect the proper gradation of tone between those. The process notoriously has its difficulties; and if it takes skill and patience to overcome these in the study of inanimate nature, with all the details lying open to the eye, it must needs be hard to do a similar thing with the complex moral perspective of human history, which recedes in time instead of in space, which has not only its changing lights but its spaces of mere darkness, and which varies so strangely according to the eye and the attitude of the onlooker. A harder problem than the artist's is set for him who, having recognised the wide difference between the moral atmosphere of to-day and of last century—having been struck by the grey-ness of the distance—seeks to satisfy himself as to how the transition has been actually made, how the tones graduate down to the present.

There are a hundred sources of illusion. Here, as it were, a chance gleam of light makes an object look brighter and therefore nearer: we must exhibit the light as well as the object to preserve the truth; here a cloud is dark, but nearer than one that is brighter; here an object is white but distant: we must indicate both the whiteness and the distance. The figure may serve broadly to excuse the shortcomings of an attempt to set forth rapidly the moral positions of things in the England of our own time and of more than a hundred years ago; the main differences, and the nature of the forces which have determined these differences. The extreme practical importance of knowing these must be the further justification of an imperfect attempt to state them.

It has been said by Mr. Ruskin (to take one more analogy from the painter's art) that whereas in the works of nearly every other landscapist of past times there is a point in the distance where the eye finds itself stopped by mere canvas, the distances of Turner have no such perceptible stopping-place, but seem to go on to infinity like the vistas of the living world itself. Evidently it takes the master's gift thus to keep true to the actual: the lesser craftsman, in the moral picture as in the painting, must be content to let canvas confess itself somewhere. So, in

the absence of the philosophy which can sum up the significance of the whole human past previous to any point in history, I would ask you first to fix your minds on a great historic English episode, more than a century distant from that other epoch-making event which I have taken as the middle distance in our study.

The great English Revolution, indeed (I do not mean that commonly called glorious), must always be prominent in our minds when we seek to consider the effect of the French Revolution on our later history; the two viewed together illustrating each other, and pointing more clearly the lessons read by each singly. In considering the fruits of the first, therefore, we shall be in view of truths confirmed by a survey of the fruits of the second. But a great Revolution is not to be rounded in an epigram, and it is no easy matter to say quite accurately what that of England did for our subsequent development.

Some very widely contrasted phenomena have to be reckoned with. It is one of the depressing conclusions of the dispassionate inquirer into these matters that Cromwell, the most just of despots and the strongest of administrators, left England in certain important respects worse and weaker than he found her when he began to deal with affairs. Without saying that the Commonwealth might have preserved itself in the long



run if he had let it, we are free to say that when he passed away, the nation's blood and stamina were poorer than before as regarded the great function of self-rule. Looking from the generation which arose in revolt against Charles the First, to that which endured worse tyranny under Charles the Second, one is startled by the change. Where have they all gone, one asks—the strong, free men who faced the king with all the tradition of regal power at his back, broke down a dynasty and a system, and purposed to frame a new State? Had the Pym, the Hollis, the Hampden, the Eliot, the Vanes, left no descendants, even as Cromwell himself left only a weakling in his place? The convinced Republicans had indeed been few, as against those who shrank from complete Democracy; but how came it that their ringing gospel had completely passed into silence?

There is only one answer. Cromwell, who would not endure the growing pains of a new Commonwealth, the storm and stress of its new life, had by taking all on his own shoulders at once paralysed men's faculty for joint action and destroyed their appetite for it, in seeming to prove that it could end only in disaster. Disaster might indeed have come otherwise had he not been there; but he represented disaster in one form, and prepared men to accept it in a

worse. The Restoration was not so much a step backwards in English history as a permanent maiming, or at least one not yet cured. With it came in some of the lowest of our low ideals—corrupt content with falsity, terror of the truth, a worship of worthlessness, a new superstition of rank and wealth.

And yet, on the other hand, a partial system of rectitude and competence such as the Protector had set working must have had some sound fruits. Mr. Allanson Picton has well said that the Commonwealth period was more free than any other time since the English settlement in Britain from the blind obedience to precedent and compromise. The Protector would not reconstruct the laws as the bolder spirits wished; but we know that he believed in giving the tools to those who could handle them; and we have the admission of Clarendon that he left the universities in a sound and vigorous condition, well filled with good scholars. Here there was special leeway to make up, for the Civil War had reduced Oxford to something like ruin, five colleges having no inmate. This fostering of capacity, and the almost delirious energy which marked the political discussions into which the short-lived Parliaments of the Protectorate threw themselves, all points to a turning into fresh intellectual channels of that movement towards

new ideals which asserted itself politically in the Civil War. The law is put in the scientific maxim, "Every active force produces more than one change—every cause produces more than one effect". The men who had been set thinking and acting by the great crisis of the Revolution, but who found themselves unable to act politically any further, must needs turn their newly stimulated thought to something.

And so it comes that while the political collapse which we call the Restoration was so complete; while the great mass of the nation was so abjectly content to put its neck beneath the foot of the new monarch that the fifty Republicans of Richard Cromwell's Parliament were virtually struck dumb once for all; yet no sooner was the new *régime* in motion than there was apparent in English life an unprecedented zeal for practical truth, expressing itself in such an active cultivation of physical science on the one hand, and mental science on the other, as began a new epoch in the intellectual life of Europe. Fanaticism was for a time in discredit, in the middle and upper classes: society had had enough of that for a while; and so the new movement is essentially rational, temperate, anti-superstitious. Educated men were sated with theology, and turned into other paths. Hence, as it has been put by Buckle, in one bold generalisation, while

the Restoration found most of them still believing in witchcraft, the Revolution of 1688 found most of them disbelievers in it. This much could science and philosophy do in one generation; and considering how little of active good can be credited to the governing class of the period, it is but fair to allow that their frivolity may have indirectly helped reason by partly putting bigotry out of countenance. Straws show how the wind blows. The explosive toys we still call Prince Rupert's drops date from the experiments of the Cavalier whose name they bear; and we find a French *savant* applying to the philosopher Hobbes for an explanation of them, and getting a very bad one, metaphysically arrived at; which he contrasts with the sounder one he received from a cultivator of physical science much less distinguished.\*

But when we name Hobbes, we are reminded that while the main fruitage of the new intellectual growth appears after the Restoration, the growth began during the Commonwealth. Hobbes's work was done in that time; Harrington's 'Oceana' was written; Locke was twenty-

\* 'Journal des Voyages de Monsieur de Monconys,' Lyon, 1666, Seconde Partie, p. 25. Monconys makes interesting mention of how Hobbes habitually complained of the hostility of Churchmen, Catholic and Protestant alike, to his *De Cive*.

eight years old when Charles II was enthroned ; Milton nourished his mind in the nobler days. We see, then, that the expansion of thought which went on till far in the next century had its impulse in the period of political ferment that ended in and with the Commonwealth. The explicit rationalism which was to distinguish the next century may be said, roughly speaking, to begin with Lord Herbert of Cherbury, styled the father of English Deism, who, publishing his most important book in Paris, in 1623, only began to be much read in England under the Protectorate ; and John Biddle, who again has been styled the father of English Unitarianism, flourished under Cromwell, who, curiously enough, not only protected him from capital punishment for blasphemy, but allowed him a hundred crowns a year during his three years' banishment to the Scilly Isles.\* An odd creed Biddle's seems to have been, asserting a Deity but ascribing to him human passions and denying him omniscience ; but it carried in it a spark of that force of critical reason which later furthered alike research and philosophy. Then Sir Thomas Browne, who combined so much scepticism with so much credulity, published his principal book in 1642, and naturally began to

\* Vaughan's 'History of England under the Stuarts and the Commonwealth', p. 541.

find his public after the war; and it is in the Commonwealth period, too, that we begin to hear of the first avowals of freethinking, so called. The great breach in convention and tradition let in light and air by many ways.

It is the great Revolution, then, that enables us to understand the intellectual progress which had been made by England in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, when the young Voltaire came to light his formidable torch at those he found burning here. At that time England was in the front of the European nations in intellectual vigor as in political freedom. There were, it is true, some grave drawbacks. Puritanism and its fetters might be shaken off by the educated; but not so easily was the stamp of a great fanaticism to be removed from the general habit of the people. The arts had been too utterly blighted by the ascetic regimen to revive at the mere bidding of the upper class, emasculated as it was on the side of its public life, debased by the vile ascendancy of the new royalism. The drama, enfeebled in the reign of Charles I by the devotion of energy in other directions, suppressed by the Commonwealth and the Protectorate, was renewed in the most corrupt form it has ever taken before or since, to fulfil the function of a gross amusement to a gross society; so that the friendly Voltaire was moved to remark that it

was too coarse for French taste. With the other arts it fared even worse ; and the England which in Elizabeth's day was noted among foreigners for excellence in music, had already retrograded towards that lower place which she later attained and still holds. Painting, never advanced in England, had made still further leeway ; and poetry was now to enter on a period of artificiality in which lyric inspiration seemed to be almost lost. So true is it that, in the changes of human society, gain in one direction tends to be balanced by loss in another.

But the gain had really been made ; and it was important enough to constitute the beginning of something like a new era in the life of France, since from our movement in the seventeenth century and the first part of the eighteenth is rightly to be traced the special preparation for the French Revolution.

How came it, then, that so much of the advance was later virtually lost ? For this is the conclusion forced upon us by a study of the courses of English life even before the French Revolution, apart from the undoubted reaction which took place after that crisis. I would put it that the Deistic movement which was flourishing in the prosperous days of Walpole's administration was really in the direction of truth and reason, although philosophically its position has not since

been found tenable. More consistent in one way than Spinozism, it wholly repelled the idea of special revelation, and promised to make an end of arbitrary dogma altogether. In the nature of things it tended to undermine superstition further than any mere rationalising of orthodoxy could go. It was a great effort of free reason, transcending tradition as nothing had yet done in the modern world; and swerving only from the strict Positivism of later science, which substitutes an unknowable totality for the old traditional hypothesis of a personal ruler, the defining of whose attributes and functions was the source of all the antagonism among the Deists themselves. Beside the theology of the modern Church, in which no single doctrine is consistently supported, but from which no single absurdity has been honestly expelled, the Deism of a hundred and fifty years ago is sane and dignified, consistent with science, and consistent with entire intellectual honesty. But save in so far as it went to foster the sect of Unitarians, it as good as disappeared from English life, being found after a hundred years to have no standing worth mentioning; while in the same period no more thoroughgoing philosophy had attained to anything like the influence Deism had possessed in the period of its comparative popularity. I do not see how we can fail to find in this a



great retrogression, and it seems well worth while to inquire how the falling back came about.

The often-quoted phrase of Burke, "Who now reads Bolingbroke?"—penned in the year 1790—is only a clause in a passage which is much more important when we read the whole. "Who," he asks, "who, born within the last forty years, has read one word of Collins, and Toland, and Tindal, and Chubb, and Morgan, and that whole race who called themselves Freethinkers? Who now reads Bolingbroke? Who ever read him through? Ask the booksellers of London what is become of all these lights of the world." Now, taking this as a fairly accurate statement of the case, the outburst is as plainly as may be an expression, not of reason triumphant over a refutation of false teaching, but of triumphant unreason. It has been answered to Burke that if his generation no longer read Bolingbroke they had read Voltaire, who was Bolingbroke's much more efficient successor; and it is true that at the time of the Revolution the influence of Voltaire was beginning to revive in England the intellectual life of 1730; but it remained the fact that there had been a period of decline, and the reaction after the Revolution was now to come to carry the decline deeper still. What then wrought the decline, in which the now bitterly reactionary

Burke so unscrupulously boasted himself, not even pretending to say that the men he reprobates had been sufficiently answered, but dishonestly calling them Atheists when he knew they were not?

In order to answer, we must glance at the interval between. If we look for those names which, on the side of orthodox or evangelical religion, are to compare in practical importance with the leading names in critical philosophy, we shall include these: in literature, Bunyan, dead in 1688, whose book had become second only to the Bible in popularity; William Law, whose 'Serious Call to a Religious Life' is still so well-known by the echo of the two first words of its title; Jeremy Taylor, in respect of his more pietistic treatises; and Bishop Butler, whose 'Analogy' became the accepted answer on the orthodox side to the Deists; and, outside of literature, last but not least, John Wesley, with such an attendant figure as George Whitefield. The moment we reckon up the social forces implied in these few names, we see that, however great might be the temporary vogue, among educated people, of the leading Deistic writers—and it was undoubtedly very great indeed—there was yet at work, during the forty years of which Burke spoke, a contrary practical influence necessarily further-reaching still, because it not

only appealed with some plausibility to reason, but invoked with extraordinary energy all those religious instincts which had so volcanically proclaimed themselves in the great period of Puritanism.

Of Bunyan's book it is needless to speak. Law, again, was so much more than a mere fanatic, that Gibbon, with whose family he had lived, speaks of him in his *Memoirs* as both a scholar and a wit—a wit in the last century sense of a good writer—and, prejudiced and intemperate as he was, he could yet make some show of a polemic answer to the subtle reasoning of Bernard Mandeville's 'Fable of the Bees'. He brought to the propagation of revived Puritanism a literary power still noteworthy, and the popularity of his 'Call' is notorious. Of Bishop Butler, again, whatever we may think of the merits of his performance, there is no gainsaying that he gave to thousands of later churchmen just what they wanted to tranquillise them under the attack of criticism, a plausible argument which threw back on the Deists the perplexity they raised against the orthodox Christian, and seemed thus to leave the latter dialectically master of the field.

And when we speak of Wesley and Whitefield, what do we not recall of sleepless zeal, patient, benevolent fanaticism, and overpowering

eloquence? Wesley's movement is in fact the visible, organised result for the eighteenth century of the revival of Puritanism, all the religious forces combining to aid it; and when we say Wesley's movement we point not only to the organisation he himself built up but to the pietistic revival he indirectly wrought in the Church itself by compelling it to fresh effort for its own preservation. Now, these influences were at work in all the strata of society, high and low; while the rationalist movement, which in the nature of things could not at first reach the uneducated, was not only not pushed there later but dwindled in vigor even among those who first received it. And here we come to one of the most significant of all the items in the explanation.

We can hear in the advanced literature of that time a note that is becoming familiar in our own day—a tone of complacent conviction that delusion and superstition are becoming things of the past—a feeling that truth is in the air, and will somehow contrive to prevail from that stable foothold. Among the most enlightened we can trace a notion that the errors of historic religion are now once for all exploded for reasoning men, surviving only among “the vulgar” as the phrase then went. We can see in Butler's ‘Analogy’ that he had been struck by this complacent tone,

and stung by it; Berkeley is so irritated by it that he loses all sense of fairness, and descends to the level of ordinary clerical polemic to wreak his resentment. At the same time, of course, the ordinary faithful were loud in their lamentations over the downfall of religion and the triumph of antichrist; and the complacent believers in the advent of a new era smiled more complacently than ever, feeling their victory complete. Just before the French Revolution, with its desperate consequences, we can find the advanced people writing in provincial magazines about the unparalleled state of things now attained to, in which superstition and error were dying a natural death, and deeds of cruelty and darkness were becoming matters of ancient history.

How often will the world repeat this tragic farce of hope and despair, in which on the one hand the worshippers of the past lament that its influence is dead, and on the other the dupes of the future congratulate themselves on the same conceit; while all the while the strong fetters of tradition lie concealed but unbroken; and the enchanted web of custom floats invisible but undissolved! In the wars of men with men, how often has the battle been lost through a blind confidence that would not gird its loins and make tense its sinews; and shall the forces of

history incarnate be overthrown by the blowing of trumpets like the walls of Jericho in the Hebrew legend?

I know no more fatal delusion in the camp of progress than that belief that when once truth has been set before the world her future is secure. "Let truth and falsehood grapple", repeat the sanguine ones: "Who ever knew Truth put to the worst in a fair encounter?" Yes, let them grapple: but what does the grapple mean? Is it Truth holding up her mirror with one hand, and her skirts with the other, while there come against her all the powers of darkness armed from all the stores of dominion; the dragon of ignorance, whose breath is a smoke that darkens the heavens, whose teeth are armed men; the hydra of custom, with her hundred heads, all hissing against the new? Wherein was to consist the fair encounter in that bygone generation? Were there not arrayed, however chaotically, against the small and careless army of light the forces of a rich ecclesiasticism, intrenched, however slackly, in every township in the State? Were there not at their back the mighty spells of memory and fear; the immemorial tradition of faith, and the ancient threat of woe and cursing against the enemies of the viewless God? It was indeed a vain dream in which men thought to conjure away all that with the white

wand of virgin Science, they moving no finger the while.

But there was something worse than dreaming at work: a worse error than the infatuation of confidence. Mixed with those who fancied that the Truth could conquer unaided, were those who held that after all there were regions where Truth need not go; that her message was not for all men; that the ignorant might judiciously be left ignorant; that true knowledge was a luxury for the fortunate few, even as in antiquity the esoteric mysteries were for the classes and the gross fable for the masses. So far as that was the creed of the rationalists they deserved to be defeated in their own place; to be turned out of their inner stronghold. And in so far as that dark tenet, that the truth is not for all men, was connected with the truth-seeking of last century; in so far as it survives in our own time, we are bound to say that it was not wholly an evil that the forces of superstition should prove stronger than those of reason. Unjudging faith in the irrational, while it must needs work harm upon harm, is not essentially a worse thing than knowledge without faith in free humanity. Darkness with devout conviction is not worse than light without earnestness. And that very retrogression which made possible the Restoration, and which, after the fortunate accident of

the second Revolution, let men sink into fat contentment under the first Georges—this of necessity reacted on the intellectual life.

Walpole was in power for thirty years, from 1712 to 1742, governing sensibly and economically so far as he went, but steadfastly and successfully putting aside all appeals for progressive action. The years of his power, says the historian Green,\* are years without parallel in our history for political stagnation: in other words, years without spread of education among the people, and fostering mental sloth among the prosperous many. It was not for nothing that the ideal of the Commonwealth had been buried under foot when Cromwell's bones were obscenely dragged from their grave. Not for nothing could the Court of the Georges represent the political ordinance of Deity for the people of these islands. The whole political unrest of the second half of the eighteenth century is pitched on a lower moral plane than that which made the Great Rebellion: the ideals were cheaper and the agitators worse; and the evangelical revival, which stood significantly aloof from politics, its leaders affecting to think only of the saving of souls, went on side by side with the most unscrupulous strife of faction.

Both tendencies alike flourished on ignorance.

\* 'Short History,' pp. 705, 709.



Wilkes, whose unworthy name became so grotesquely associated with that of Liberty, was the successful contemporary of Wesley; the rancorous and illaudable Junius was a political power in the period of reviving orthodoxy. It may seem invidious thus to suggest a connexion between a religious revival and a worsening of the public character in secular things; but I say advisedly that those were cognate phenomena; nay more, that the austere Wesley was doing harm with his good while the scapegrace Wilkes was doing good with his harm. Assuredly both profited by ignorance; and the organisms which went into hysterics under the oratory of Whitefield and the earnest menaces of Wesley, were not at all of a different strain from those which roared for Wilkes and Liberty and bellowed execration against Lord Bute. The records of Whitefield's preaching, indeed, seem to carry us back to the intellectual plane of the age of the Crusades. Apart from his crowded audiences in the churches, he could draw on Kennington Common, on week-days, audiences of thirty and forty thousand people, with hundreds of horsemen, and sometimes as many as fourscore carriages, from the London of 150 years ago.\* Now, Whitefield was a wonderfully gifted orator, but a mere orator, with the physical and emotional

\* Southey's 'Life of Wesley', Bohn's ed., p. 163.

faculties, but no corresponding intellectual endowment. If we are to term Wesley, in Mr. Arnold's phrase, a mind of the third order, we must style Whitefield one of the seventh. Yet Whitefield effected far more temporary commotion, lacking only Wesley's legislative and organising power.

Wesley himself is at once the type and leader of the revived Puritanism of last century, and the proof of its intellectual inferiority, relatively to the degree of general enlightenment of the period. No one can study his character without seeing in it elements of intellectual breadth and striking superiority to prejudice, in addition to other good moral qualities; but he is on the whole behind his age in a way that the Commonwealth Puritans were not. His separation of the sacred from the secular; his reducing of piety to a matter of only private or sectarian salvation, aloof from national polity, makes his theory of life relatively contracted and unfruitful; his movement carried in it no such seeds of intellectual growth as did the earlier.

And if we attentively consider the case of Bishop Butler, we shall see, despite the air of dignity and authority which belongs to his method, and despite his prestige as a philosophic theologian, that he too stands on a relatively lower moral plane than the corresponding men

of the previous century, though his reasoning power cannot be called inferior. Taylor and Chillingworth stand out for us above all things as men who appeal to reason, and are thus for their period, though believing Churchmen, only less advanced than the daring thinkers who transcended their beliefs. Now, the whole force of Butler's argument is to justify unreasonableness by an apparent process of reasoning. The Deists had urged that the Scriptures did not decently conform to any enlightened theory of the divine character; that they did not at all satisfy the thinking mind. Butler answered that the natural world itself, with its evils and its anomalies, did not satisfy the thinking mind or conform to one's theories of the divine character; therefore it followed that the Bible might be as much the revelation of the Deity as the physical order of things. The argument was at bottom profoundly fallacious, because it left all religions on one footing—all probably divine because they were unintelligible and inconsistent. The logical conclusion would have been simply that men were unable to ascertain what the divine mind was, and therefore could not possibly know any revelation to be divine in the sense of being superhuman and apart from other faiths. But Butler never faced this conclusion at all; and he deftly evaded the

argument as to other religions being as inexplicable as the Christian, by remarking that though life as a whole was perplexing, yet there were ways of living judiciously, and that similarly one could find reasons in Christianity for choosing it as a creed. Thus he goes back to the very standing ground which before had been confessedly demolished, and substantially teaches that men are to accept the faith alike because it appeals to their reason and because it does not.

Surely this is essentially a poorer note to sound, considering the intermediate progress in the use of applied reason, than that of Chillingworth. Butler encouraged men to live in credulous confusion, telling themselves that since they did not understand the universe they might as well accept any dogma the Church taught them. I cannot see that such an achievement entitles us, as one living teacher would have it, to take a national pride in Butler as an incomparable lover of truth, merely because he once happened to say that there is no good in deceiving ourselves. As a matter of fact he did help men to deceive themselves, and he became a leader in the production of that order of literature of which the function is to enable thoughtful people, who are not quite thoughtful enough, to remain satisfied in their superstitions.

Of course, when we thus disparage Butler as

beside Churchmen of an earlier day, we are bound in sound philosophy to remember that he suffered from his surroundings as they gained from theirs. There was a lift in the moral air of their time: there was something deadening in that of his. Convention was once more enthroned: in matters of conduct, custom was more than ever the moral standard; and custom had seldom been more hollow and artificial. Save the efforts of the Deists, everything made for intellectual quietism; and we must in justice remember, in Butler's case as in Berkeley's, that they did see a careless scepticism not seldom going hand in hand with profligacy, and that it would have taken a large endowment of candor to remember that the loose sceptics were not the reasoning ones, and that orthodoxy had more licence to answer for in that way than unbelief. We sum up, then, that the general trend of the times pushed a thoughtful Churchman towards an unadventurous and compromising quietism, just as it fostered the poetry of the school of Pope, the formal prose from which even Goldsmith did not quite break free, the stiff dances, the cautious and conventional painting. And it is noteworthy that Butler's conservatism did not end with his reasoning in the *Analogy*; for we find him later, as bishop, laying a significant stress on the immense importance of ritual

and ceremonial and outward observance as fostering the religious spirit in mankind. The note here is certainly thinner than that of Taylor and Chillingworth.

It is these facts, then, broadly speaking, that partially justify—or rather explain, for they cannot really justify—the still not uncommon habit of speaking disparagingly of the eighteenth century as a whole. But it seems needless to extend that controversy. Carlyle and Coleridge have eloquently condemned the century before their own: Mr. Harrison and Mr. Stephen have ably defended it; and it is unnecessary to recapitulate the arguments, confined as they are pretty much to the side of the defence. The indictment of a century, indeed, is to the full as unwise as could be one against a nation; and the dispute is in a manner analogous to a discussion of the relative merits of Monday and Tuesday. But in so far as a sentimental habit still survives of disparaging the men and the achievements of last century indiscriminately, it has to be said that, after all, the retrogression, so far as our nation is concerned, began with the actual failure and surrender of the Puritans in their own period; that their own generation let its gains fall from its hands; that the work of Cromwell broke down and that the work of Washington did not; that Benjamin Franklin is

a more considerable force for the good of humanity than any of the Pilgrim Fathers.

But instead of thus weighing generation against generation, let us take to ourselves the lesson that is taught alike by the failure we record and by the harm which followed it. That lesson is that to succeed we must be at once determined and wary, strenuous and sane; that not to build securely is in many ways worse than not to build at all; that to dream we have made progress when we set up a political fabric which does not rest on the free and intelligent will of the people at large is to prepare for ourselves a ruinous awakening and for our descendants something worse still—a blasting of their faith in human destinies and a paralysis of their aspirations, and therefore of their powers. The past is a record of violent advances and violent relapses: it is ours, in matters of action, to shun that falsehood of extremes which consists in setting up a polity that is without ripeness and without solidity; but also to shun the far profounder falsehood still which in its very thought disparages the ideal truth because that seems to be extreme. We shall never achieve the good and the beautiful in deed till in thought we are true to the true.

## II.

When Carlyle stated as a generally felt truth,

fifty years ago, that the French Revolution was "*the* event of these modern ages", he perhaps had not fully realised the scope of his proposition, deeply as he had been impressed by the great convulsion of which he has given us such a luridly impressive picture. It does not appear from his works that Carlyle ever asked himself, "What effect has the French Revolution substantially had on *me*?"—effect, that is, as apart from the opinion which he had of course formed with regard to it. And it has been truly said of him that he himself in his later life exemplified the influence of the Revolution in many ways after he had written his history of it.

But this is only saying, of course, that the French Revolution deeply influenced the entire generation which followed it; and it has long seemed to me that a history of how the French Revolution has affected social evolution in England is only less worth writing for us in this country than the history of the Revolution itself. No one now disputes, probably, that one of its great results here was an immense and profound reaction; but of the range and details of that reaction no adequate admeasurement has yet been forthcoming; and, indeed, the difficulty and perplexity of the problem may well hinder thoughtful men from professing to work it out. My rough and ready survey, therefore, cannot



possibly do more than set forth in a little detail what the problem actually is.

I have put it to you that in the third quarter of the eighteenth century certain intellectual impulses deriving from the great English Revolutionary period had been visibly spending themselves; that the corrupt ideals which were enthroned at the Restoration had been reacting perniciously on the nation's mental life in all directions; and that finally the promising movement of religious rationalism which had flourished during the first thirty or forty years of the century had been thwarted and followed by a pietistic revival which was essentially unfavorable to truth-seeking in any direction, and which flourished alike on the ignorance of a multiplying population and on the prosperity which went hand in hand with that ignorance. In a concise way, I could not give you a better notion of what this reaction or retrogression practically meant than by quoting the unpremeditated account of it which Buckle wrote in his commonplace-book:—

"In literature," he begins, "the supreme chief was Johnson, a man of some learning and great acuteness, but overflowing with prejudice and bigotry. The little metaphysical literature which we did possess went on deteriorating at each stage of its progress, from Hartley to Priestley, and from Priestley to [Erasmus] Darwin. While the wretched work of Delolme on the English Constitution was read with avidity, the pro-

found and yet practical inquiries of Hume were almost neglected. In ecclesiastical literature the most prominent names were Warburton, the bully, and Hurd, the sneak. . . . In 1776 Hume writes to Gibbon, 'But among many other marks of decline, the prevalence of superstition in England prognosticates the fall of philosophy and decay of taste'. And in the same year he writes to Adam Smith in a similar strain. The fear entertained of the French Revolution gave an influence to such women as Hannah More, and they tended still further to depress our literature. . . . We produced no historian. Gibbon was indeed an exception, but he was a Frenchman in everything except the accident of his birth. . . . In 1771 there was translated into English Millot's wretched History of England. . . . Such was the want of energy that, although we possessed a settlement in India since early in the 17th century, it was not until near the end of the 18th that Sanscrit was first studied in England; and during 150 years of our dominion, there were only to be found in the whole of the East India Company two persons acquainted with the Chinese language. While France, with scarcely any intercourse with China, had established a Chinese professorship in Paris, our own Government, intent on nothing but wealth and military power, had not taken a single step in that direction. . . . It is a melancholy consideration that the only great historian we produced in the 18th century was Gibbon, a notorious Deist. . . . The most celebrated Whig historian was Mrs. Macaulay, a foolish and restless democrat, and while she was still alive, Dr. Wilson erected in the chancel of St. Stephen's, Walbrook, a statue to her."\*

In listening to this you have doubtless said to yourselves that such a summing-up of a period

\* 'Miscellaneous and Posthumous Works,' abridged ed., i, 264-6.

of history does not give the whole truth ; that even on the face of it we have the admission of the performance of Hume and Gibbon, two of the most powerful minds, in different ways, that these islands have produced ; that Adam Smith, in the same period, was re-creating political economy ; that Cowper was sounding a fresh note in poetry, and Burns a fresher and stronger ; and that Goldsmith and Fielding were beginning a new period in literature. It has always to be remembered that even in so-called periods of decline there is progress of some kinds : that there is no such thing as a universal retrogression even when a civilisation is decaying. All this Buckle would doubtless have set forth had he lived to expand his notes into his book. But observe all the while where the elements of revival came from : how Hume and Adam Smith were Scotchmen stimulated by the intellectual movement in France, which we have seen was earlier stimulated from England ; how Gibbon was, as Buckle noted, a Frenchman in his culture ; how little Burns owed to English inspiration ; how Berkeley, Swift, Goldsmith, and Burke, four of the most gifted minds of their time in their different walks, were Irishmen, outcroppings as it were of a yet fresh and unsophisticated nationality. And observe, too, as justifying what has been said of the tendency

of the pietistic revival, how thoroughly the progress of social enlightenment, so to speak, in the England of last century, was bound up with rationalism in religion. Buckle in another passage remarks with sincere regret, for he was then substantially orthodox in his beliefs, that "The five writers to whose genius we owe the first attempt at comprehensive views of history were Bolingbroke, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Hume, and Gibbon. Of these the second was but a cold believer in Christianity, if indeed he believed in it at all; and the other four were avowed and notorious infidels."\*

Such a generalisation prepares us to understand that at the time when Burke exulted in the neglect into which the earlier freethinkers had fallen, a new movement had been in formation in England which was proximately traceable to Voltaire. By burrowing in the British Museum one discovers that there was being published in England, before the Revolution, what was apparently intended to be a complete edition of Voltaire's works, under the supervision of Smollett and others, and that there were many issues of translations of single books by him; while in the whole subsequent period there has been apparently no English translation from him save a few undertaken by free-

\* *Id.* p. 254.

thinking publishers;† his poetic, dramatic, and historical works being kept equally unknown to the merely English reader by reason of the overwhelming prejudice which attached to his name from the Revolution period. With Rousseau the case has been somewhat similar. His 'Confessions', indeed, sell in English on the strength of their reputation for prurience, but none of his other works seem to have found favor with post-Revolution publishers on this side of the Channel.

Now, it is needless to inform instructed people that Voltaire and Rousseau were not Atheists, though so dense is the prejudice of orthodoxy among us still that they are so described in a standard school-book. Voltaire may have leant towards Agnosticism in his later years, but he had written much as a zealous Deist, and against Atheism; while Rousseau was passionately hostile to scepticism. Again, Voltaire was not at all a revolutionary in tastes, temper, or teaching. Yet so strong was the reaction, led by Burke, against everything associated with French innovations, that all eminent Frenchmen alike were outlawed by the average English public opinion; and the primitive passion of national hatred engendered by the Napoleonic wars

[† A fresh translation of *Candide* has since been produced in the ordinary way of publishing.]

served still further to banish the influence of French enlightenment.

And the measure meted out to that was equally meted out to the work of enlightened Englishmen. Gibbon himself was driven by the Revolution into a timorous yet tenacious Conservatism; and the same kind of temper in other men served to frustrate the natural influence of his critical work. He had made the first great application of the modern historic method to the history of religion, carrying to almost complete rationalism the critical process begun by Middleton within the pale of the Church. But the ecclesiastical resistance evoked by his work at its first appearance was reinforced to such a degree by the reaction against the Revolution that only in our own time has the line of evolution, so to speak, been resumed.

And so with Hume. That powerful mind, revolting from the fanaticism bound up with past democratic progress in his own country, and from the blatant faction bound up with it in his own time, passed into an extreme phase of political Conservatism; and, by impressing that on men's minds, thwarted the purposes of his philosophic performance. Hume the historian, made popular by political reaction, wrought to ostracise Hume the thinker; and at this moment the only edition of his essays sold at a moderate price is

incomplete; the pious publisher of a professed reprint not having scrupled to employ falsehood while in intention safeguarding religion.\*

It is not possible, however, to state adequately the scope and force of the reaction by merely noting what happened in the case of the literary fortunes of one or two writers. It invaded every department of thought, and I have been unable to discover that in any direction the results were indirectly good, save in perhaps one. It happened that the political optimism of Rousseau, reflected in England by Godwin in his 'Political Justice', had the effect of stimulating Malthus to institute afresh a sociological inquiry which before him had only been partially carried out. A benevolent man, working in a conservative spirit, established a great truth in social philosophy, now beginning to be tardily recognised in the most diverse quarters, by Catholic and by Protestant Church dignitaries, as by the toiling poor, whom it most nearly concerns. But it would be going too far to credit the achievement of Malthus to reaction, although that was the first source of his impulse. The spirit of reaction, properly so called, did not display itself as a rule in patient research. What it did do

[\* Fresh editions have since appeared; one, in Mr. Grant Richards' series of 'World Classics', astonishingly cheap.]

was to make men resist and resent every effort towards change or improvement, so that they found their social science in after-dinner rhetoric about the splendour of the English constitution and the merits of their forefathers; and met all arguments by references to what had come of the new ideas in France.

Thus all evil things had a new bulwark against reason and righteousness, Conservatism making no attempt to distinguish between the rotten and the sound in what it cherished from the past. In 1778, Bishop Lowth, publishing his translation of Isaiah, declares that "the expediency grows every day more and more evident" of a translation of the Scriptures "to better advantage than as they appear in the present English translation". A hundred years were to elapse before this opinion was acted on by the hide-bound Church. The spuriousness of the Trinitarian text in 1 John, v. 7, was proved to demonstration by Porson in 1790; but that, too, was to escape official repudiation for a century. All attempts to improve the criminal code, which during the stress of the reactionary period had become the most hatefully barbarous in the civilised world, were strenuously resisted by the whole strength of Church and aristocracy; now become perhaps more effective than at any period since the Reformation. And in the re-



gency and reign of George IV we find the nation touching as low a point in moral humiliation as it had reached after the death of Cromwell, rendering loyal homage to a personality whom to honor was to degrade even mediocrity. Now became apparent the full import of that ignoble cry of Burke: "We fear God; we look up with awe to kings". If by their Gods ye shall know men, equally shall ye know them by their approved kings.

Know them, that is, not as images of the monarch they revere, but as essentially affected in their characters by that reverence. In Sir Walter Scott, for instance, we have a man of sweet and chivalrous nature thoroughly dwarfed on the political and philosophical side by his worship of the past and his conventional royalism. In such an intellectual soil as that, no great or fruitful social principle could grow. It is in that period, the twenty-five years from Burke's "Reflections on the French Revolution" to Waterloo, that the stamp of commonplace was most deeply impressed on English thinking: there is an invincible flavor of stupidity in the respectable opinion of the time. It was then that the attitude towards life which we term Grundyism became most stiffly fixed; and in the kind of senseless obloquy which followed the pure-natured and high-hoping Shelley we have

what is virtually a new development in English literary history. Johnson, indeed, was in large part a Philistine, but it was in the generation after him that what we call Philistinism first seems to become the prevailing tone in educated society. As Emerson said later, "In the drawing-rooms you expect them to laugh at the fanaticism of the vulgar; but they do not; they are the vulgar".

The Philistine note sounds persistently even through the poetry of Wordsworth and the philosophy of Coleridge, not to speak of the philosophising of De Quincey and the writings of Southey. The Lake poets were men who had undergone the profound intellectual misfortune of first cherishing a Utopian theory of life and then relapsing into one that was entirely unprogressive. Hence a something worse than deadness and obstructiveness, & positively backward tendency in their political influence. If we compare the moral aroma, so to speak, of the great French writers of the time before the Revolution, as Voltaire and Diderot, with that of these Englishmen of the next generation, we feel that though the latter are in some ways more moral and conscientious, yet in their social capacity they are less so, lacking that ennobling hatred of injustice, and that enthusiasm of humanity, which made their predecessors such

potent forces for freedom. One says of these reactionists as of the orthodox thinkers of the middle of the previous century, that they represent a lowering of the moral pitch, a substituting of prejudice and sophistry for the instincts of justice and truth. In reading the talk of Coleridge on the public life of his time, one acquires a distrust of his whole habit of thought, feeling that there is no injustice he might not find justifications for, no anomaly he would not defend, no prejudice he would not glose over with an air of philosophy. And Wordsworth was among the stiffest opponents of Catholic Emancipation.

Not so was it with the men who worked the downfall of outworn theories and time-honored tyrannies at the end of the age before. Separated, as they should be, from those who later became responsible for the miscarriage of the Revolution—for its transformation from a work of peaceful reconstruction into one of bloody destruction—they stand out for us to-day as great and loyal servants of the human race, who hated darkness and cruelty with the hatred that men had before given to mere heresy and to merely alien peoples; who trampled the worst instincts of mankind under foot, and consumed themselves in the struggle to give light and help to all. Voltaire's passionate impeachment of in-

justice and persecution, Diderot's undying zeal for light and knowledge—these are memories that will be green for Europe when the narrow orthodoxies of later times are become as dust and ashes under the feet of instructed men. And it will not be counted to the honor of those who came after such, that out of terror at the historic sequel of a period of truth-seeking they became hostile to truth, and that for fear lest freedom should go too far they ranged themselves on the side of bondage.

Of course the one explanation of reaction against the Revolution will not cover the whole of English history, even for the next two generations. To attempt to dispose of a whole period in one formula, to go about to open all the locks with one key, is to lapse from science into shibboleth. Even in stating what the effects of the reaction were, we are uttering the names of new representative men and pointing to new tendencies. Mr. Green, indeed, has laid it down that from the death of Perceval in 1812 "the development of English life, which had been roughly arrested in 1792 by the reaction against the French Revolution, began again to take its natural course." It will be obvious to everyone on reflexion, I think, that this very sharp division line—"from that moment" are Mr. Green's words—is unphilosophical and untenable; but

it is indeed true that about that time there began to assert themselves certain new and important factors in English life. "It is from the fatal years between the Peace of Amiens and Waterloo," says Mr. Green, "that we must date that war of classes, that social severance between rich and poor, between employers and employed, which still forms the great difficulty of English politics." Again the dating is unphilosophically hard and fast, but the facts pointed to are real enough. Instead, however, of following the history of the new industrial problem, I wish you now to consider the fact that that great commercial expansion with which the problem was bound up had the effect, among other things, of preserving in one direction the old reactionary bias.

To see how this came about, we have to consider on what lines it was that the development of which Mr. Green speaks was resumed after Waterloo. No resumption, of course, could have taken place were it not that all through the Revolution period a small number of energetic minds continued to think and study in disregard of the reigning conventions. Such a band of forward-looking thinkers we see emerging to new effort in the group round Bentham—practically the only circle of capable thinkers in the England of their time. Again we see that

rationalism in religion is a condition of fresh progress; but what is most remarkable in regard to this particular group is that its religious rationalism is always kept in the background.

Godwin was a publisher, and dealt in and even wrote moral tales for the young which were suited for orthodox households; and while a rationalist himself he brought up his daughter Mary in orthodox principles, in order that she should have the less difficulty in earning her living as a governess: a hardly blameworthy course from the point of view of parental foresight, but one which, as it happened, prepared unhappiness for the girl in her married life with Shelley. She did not share her husband's philosophy, and suffered in consequence.

That, however, is not so significant a case as those of the Benthamite group. James and John Mill, Grote, Ricardo, and the others of that school, were one and all unbelievers in the ordinary sense of the term; but while they never dissembled, never professed a faith they had not, their unbelief was systematically kept in the background; and this, in the case of men so conscientious, could only mean that they knew an avowal of their beliefs would undo all their influence in political and social affairs. Ricardo took rank as a leading thinker in economics, without his religious beliefs being whispered of.

During John Mill's life, indeed, there was a certain suspicion among educated people as to *his* unbelief; but one finds his authority cited on points of philosophy by bigots who would have scouted the name of a known sceptic; and though Professor Bain tells us that he once privately avowed a purpose of ultimately using all his acquired influence to discredit the current orthodoxy, the purpose was only partially fulfilled by his posthumously published essays on religion. Now, all this is traceable to the special reinforcement of orthodoxy which took place at the Revolution. That had taken place, we must remember, not only in England but in France. M. de Tocqueville, in his work on the *Old Régime*, remarks with satisfaction that rationalist theories in England after the Revolution were thrown out by the effort of society itself, without the help of Government.

"But," he goes on, "why look for illustrations elsewhere than in France? What Frenchman to-day"—that was at the beginning of the Second Empire—"would think of writing the works of Diderot and Helvétius? Who wants to read them? I might almost ask, who knows their titles? The limited experience which we have acquired during sixty years in public life has sufficed to disgust us with this dangerous literature. See how the respect for religion has gradually resumed its empire in the different classes of the nation, as each of them has acquired that experience in the hard school of revolution. The old *noblesse*, which was the most irreligious class before '89, became the

most devout after '93. . . . When the *bourgeoisie* felt themselves struck in their triumph, they were seen in their turn to come back to their beliefs. Little by little the respect for religion penetrated wherever men had something to lose by popular disorder, and incredulity disappeared, or at least hid itself, as the fear of revolutions rose."\*

Here, you will observe, there is no pretence that scepticism had been overthrown by sound philosophy; the statement is that men took to religion because they thought it was politically safer; though of course we know that when orthodoxy was in the ascendant in France there were many sincere believers, typified in Guizot and Ozanam, who were indeed too devout to reason honestly against unfaith. If any comment or judgment on De Tocqueville's position be needed, it is furnished in the most crushing conceivable form by that very Second Empire which began as he was writing. The reconverted France, in which men rejected rationalism because it was apparently not safe, underwent revolution after revolution, and at length succumbed to the shameful dominion of the Third Napoleon. So much could opportunist religion do for a great people. Under the Empire, as we know, De Tocqueville's account of things was swiftly enough turned to confusion; so that Republican France to-day is once more in the front

\* *L'ancien régime*, 2e édit. pp. 257-8.



rank of fearless truth-seeking thought, and lending light to us in England. But fifty years ago, as De Tocqueville says, both countries were disposed to tabu all free inquiry into religious questions, England even more than France.

Men like the Mills, Ricardo, and Grote, could and did, as we know, influence public opinion in secular affairs, though they were always in a political minority; and it is obvious that the passing of the first great Reform Bill and the abolition of the Corn Laws were effected by a vigorous outbreak of living criticism and moral energy. Indeed, in studying the current records of that reform period we seem to detect a fuller attainment of the scientific attitude in social matters than has been reached since. One reads of courses of lectures on economics attended by a thousand workmen in a small town; and the simple fact of the wide and quick sale of Harriet Martineau's political economy tales among the working people about fifty years ago is a fairly significant proof of a peculiar intellectual awakening among them. It is doubtful whether any similar literary experiment could succeed in the same way or on the same scale to-day: the same audience probably would not be found.

And the reason for this is simply that the success of the Free Trade movement, bringing

about as it did a vast industrial expansion which has only in the last ten years or so begun seriously to slacken, has produced a new set of conditions in England by producing, so to speak, a new population. It is no loose paradox, but the simple fact, to say that a generation of great commercial prosperity at first lowered the average of industrial culture; and that save for the operation of the Education Act the lowering would to-day have been very serious indeed. Industrial expansion, in the absence of special educative machinery, means the facile multiplication of population, with a tendency to lower standards of mental life. This is a simple question of material and biological fact. If workers are enabled to live more easily, and are not at the same time helped to better intellectual training, they marry more lightly, rear offspring which in the terms of the case find work easily and also marry readily; and so a low culture standard is fostered. The Education Act did not come before it was desperately wanted.

But that is not all. The industrial expansion not only multiplied the proletariat: it multiplied the middle class. And whereas the middle class, at the critical period, had been driven like the working class to face the social question, and come to intelligent conclusions, the sequel of prosperity relaxed that pressure for both classes

alike, and the middle class in the prosperous period became what Mr. Arnold has so often called it—materialised, or Philistine, or whatever other epithet is oftenest registered in that critic's harmonious pages.

Observe, neither class had ever been rationalised since the revolution in the matter of religion; and the spell of good fortune weakened even the stimulus to scientific thinking in the matter of social policy. Doubly, then, must it have weakened the spirit of truth-seeking in the direction of religion, in so far as that regarded the prosperous middle classes themselves. And despite the constant allusions on both sides to the spread of enlightenment and belief, I have little hesitation in saying that the *relative numerical strength* of rationalism and dogmatic faith is not greatly different to-day from what it was a hundred and fifty years ago; and that what difference there is is in favor of nominal orthodoxy, though probably not in favor of strong belief.

This is, remember, as regards numbers. I do not for a moment admit that the proportion of intelligence lies in the same way. The Church to-day has no Swift to assail with masterly irony the Collinses of the times: and the side of reason has a band of more instructed champions than Collins. But as regards mere numbers and con-

ventional opinion, the facts are as I say: and as to this anyone can satisfy himself by comparing the recorded sale of the Deistic literature of last century, among the then so small population of England, with that of the rationalist literature of to-day, whether popular or of the more philosophic and scholarly order.\* It is not that there are now fewer or less instructed rationalists—the facts are the other way—but that there is a larger mass of complacent and conventional orthodoxy, substantially unaffected by the popularised science of the time, and combining a doubtful acceptance of Darwin on creation and Tyndall on miracles with a confused reverence for Scriptural mysteries and an incoherent hope of immortality. This, I repeat, is in part the result of the commercial expansion which multiplied an unstudious and unphilosophic class that was yet wealthy and prone to give liberal support to its religious views; thus perpetrating that bias to respectable and safe orthodoxy which set in with so much force at the Revolution.

This, I know, is not a common view; but let any doubting inquirer carefully compare the public literary tone of to-day in religious matters with that of what we call the Deistic period of last

[\* In fifteen years' time, but especially in the last three, there has taken place a notable change. The cheap reprints of the Rationalist Press Association have had an enormous sale.]

century, and he will see that the prevailing notion of our all-round advancement is a mistake. Who would have thought, at least what Deist would have thought, in that time, that when a hundred and twenty years later a Bishop made a careful arithmetical analysis of the Pentateuch, he would not only be ferociously assailed within the Church, but reproached by a professed rationalist for not writing his book in Latin, so that it should be read only by the clergy? We hear it constantly said around us that every educated man is emancipated from traditional dogma; and yet there is not a single popular middle-class newspaper that will venture to put such a proposition before the public.\* The sale of Mr. Spencer's philosophic works is at this moment below that of many rationalist books of a hundred and fifty years ago. A book professing to reconcile science and religion by a new method, though it ranks in philosophic and logical power lower than anything of the kind in the century, yet wins, by color and vivacity of style, not only thousands of readers, but critical applause from what pass for competent tribunals; and at this moment there is an abundant market among the upper and middle classes for works which, professing

[\* This again has ceased to be accurate. Such avowals have within the past few years been made by various journals of good middle-class standing.]

to set forth the results of scholarship on Christian history, are pronounced by conscientious men even within the field of orthodox scholarship to be as worthless and retrogressive as they are pretentious and popular. Paley's book of *Evidences*, written for the controversial needs of last century, is still the text-book in the universities.

In the face of these things, I must make an earnest protest against the tone taken by some rationalists as to the inexpediency of carrying on the work of rationalist propaganda. We are told that the work has been done; that all competent minds are satisfied; and all that is now to be done is to leave superstitious orthodoxy to die a natural death; as if any organised superstition ever did die without being persistently assailed. It seems to be assumed that when we and our circle have learned the truth, those who seek to spread it further are to be discountenanced. Of whom then does the nation consist, if the enlightenment of the select few is to be held as constituting the triumph of light and the dispersal of darkness?

It is the delusion of our Deist ancestors over again. The truth is held to be safe because the minority have seen it; and the victory is counted won before half the nation has realised that there is a contest. The truth safe, with half the proletariat fluctuating between mur-

derous toil and still deadlier idleness, so little sure of actual subsistence that it can hardly give a thought to higher things! The truth safe, with millions living in a wretchedness never long surpassed in any great State since civilisation began; with a strenuous fanaticism at work with heart and soul to propagate the faith in its most primitive form, and numbering its illiterate converts by the hundred thousand! The truth safe, with the bribe of a vast revenue devoted yearly to the buttressing of the same faith in a modified form among a largely idle and insincere upper class and a middle class in large part too pre-occupied to lend more than half an ear to any message that calls for mental exertion?

If I use strong words it is because the illusion of success is frequently worded in the strongest form; and because some rationalists are habitually given to reasoning as if we had in this country attained an average culture which sufficed to bring unreason into disrepute. And if this calls for protest, still more does that other attitude of mind which prescribes a safe neutrality, and leaves an admittedly false faith unchallenged, nay encourages it, on the specious plea that a false faith is necessary for the ignorant. It cannot be too often urged that one of the proximate causes of the moral collapse of those ancient civilisations whose history we

know, was that the comparatively enlightened few deliberately acted on the principle that the ignorant many were to be *kept* ignorant and deluded. If that was a ruinous principle for Egypt and for Rome, can it work welfare for us to-day? Never believe it! If this or any other people is to attain a genuine well-being, alike in moral and material things, it must be because it has reached something like a unity of moral consciousness, in which the deliberate countenancing of deceit and delusion is no more acquiesced-in than deliberate theft or injustice.

No man is on safe moral ground who flatters himself that he is deceiving his fellows for their good. But the temper which does this has never been extinct; is not now extinct; is at this moment common. Last century we find Conyers Middleton, the Churchman who first applied the true historical method to the investigation of miraculous Church history, declaring his opinion that the populace must have "some traditional religion or other"; just as a champion of conventional religion in Parliament some years ago insisted on belief in "some divinity or other." A generation later we have a plainer note, in the story recorded by Brougham of the Duke of Queensberry's attitude towards Thomas Paine; "Paine's opinions are true," said that nobleman, "and that is the



reason I want to see them put down by the law." And at this moment there are hundreds of clergymen in the Church of England of whom it may fairly be doubted whether they believe one of the theological doctrines they preach. This is better, doubtless, than a reign of mere ignorant orthodoxy in the church; but can such a situation be permanent? If the church be not reformed, can the position of these men remain wholesome?

That such conditions contain any special security for even intellectual progress I cannot believe. Why, so late as the fourth century, long after the pagan world had tried in turn all the theological systems of its different sections, accomplished philosophers were found to defend expressly, on metaphysical and other grounds, the most obscene of the old worships; and a mythology which was discredited in one century was rehabilitated in the next; so subtle and so Protean are the forces of reaction in human affairs. I do not say that in this country we need conceivably fear a return to the worst forms of intolerance; though such a relapse from tolerance to persecution did in some sort take place last century. In the latter half of it we read of Methodists flogged through town streets for preaching; of bands of them specially seized for impressment in the navy on account of their re-

ligious policy—a wickedness indeed not more atrocious than the general operation of that infamous system. We read of dissenters deliberately and systematically elected to offices they could not legally fill, in order that they might be then fined for non-acceptance; of men and women imprisoned for years on end under the merely ecclesiastical sentence of excommunication—all this more than a century after England had risen against the iniquities of the Star Chamber. I do not say we run any visible risk of a return to anything even analagous to these infamies, though there still exist unjust laws which inflict monstrous disabilities on disbelief. Risks of future persecution are indeed not those with which courageous and conscientious people will much concern themselves. But I do urge that, in view of all past history, the immediate future of these islands is no such assured and inevitable triumph of enlightened opinion as some are wont to declare; and that if our era is to have a happier path than those of the past, it must be because its children earnestly determine that it shall be so.

And it is not a question of merely publishing abstract and concrete truth; any more than it is one of merely promoting physical well-being. Assuredly the spirits of truth and of goodness are never to be sundered without harm. Earnest

men and women are learning in these days to see that a nation's life is a moral whole, in which disease or hardship in any part must needs affect the welfare of all; that men may intellectually perish in physical plenty for lack of knowledge; and that gained knowledge may fall from their hands because it is kept as the heritage of a well-placed few, leaving in outer darkness that fatal multitude whose mental life is ultimately that of the nation of whose numbers they form the bulk. Leave the populace benighted and it will in the long run drag the upper orders down. But if in England our outlook to-day is substantially hopeful, not the least of the causes is that throughout this century, while in middle- and upper-class society the religious problems of last century were nervously or stolidly ignored, there has been kept up among the workers, under a thousand discouragements, a stream of rationalist tendency, dating from the man who popularised alike scepticism and democratism at the Revolution epoch, and who was an incalculable force in the establishment of the American Republic—a service for which he has had no thanks from his Christian countrymen, yet for which he would have been hailed as a national hero if only he had been decorously orthodox in speech.

But, let me repeat, there is no true success short of a unity of moral consciousness among those

who hope for a better future. And I call it nothing short of a calamity when good men and women, who see the terrible need for transforming social life, speak as if the search for truth were a vain matter, and as if the zeal for spreading it deserved no respect. If such will not learn that each one of man's forward instincts is as sacred as the others, they will none the less find that it is as essential; and till they learn both lessons they are but frustrating their own endeavors.

The hope of union and reconciliation, one feels, lies in the fact that each true enthusiast desires to make the scope of his gospel as wide as humanity itself, turning his back on the sinister doctrine which would for ever exclude the bulk of mankind from the fairest share of their race's heritage. As it is in the physical human world, so it is in the intellectual and the moral. After many ages men have learned that misery and squalor cannot subsist without menace to the fortunate in the midst of their luxury; that the crowded lairs of the wretched beget disease for the patrician and whelm him in the common death. So, too, they slowly begin to see that a broad surrounding sea of ignorance is a perpetual menace to culture, and that a nation's mental standard is from age to age unalterably determined by that of its populace, rising with that, and sinking with it. There then lie the teach-

ings of self-interest, which he who runs may read. But let us trust that, instead of needing long to dwell on these, we are entering on a time when the mere knowledge of outside darkness and destitution shall be sting and stimulus enough to the general moral sense ; when men and women shall count it their own most intolerable burden that others should be weary and heavy laden and have not where to lay their heads, and that ignorance and delusion should reign where the light of knowledge might have been made so to burn that all life should be transfigured in it.

By JOHN M. ROBERTSON.

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UNIFORM WITH THIS WORK.

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